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EVALUATING ASYNCHRONOUS CLIENT TRAINING IN EDTECH: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF FINALSITE'S COMPOSER LEARNING PATH

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EVALUATING ASYNCHRONOUS CLIENT TRAINING IN EDTECH: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF FINALSITE'S COMPOSER LEARNING PATH

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Dedication

To every woman who thought she couldn't and to myself, because I did.

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Abstract

Client-facing training in EdTech remains a blind spot in evaluation research. Most corporate training studies focus on internal employee development, leaving unanswered questions about how technology companies effectively prepare their external clients to use complex products. This mixed-methods program evaluation examines Finalsite's Composer Learning Path, an asynchronous training program redesigned in 2024 from lengthy video courses into 73 micro-courses serving over 50,000 learners.

Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Evaluation Model, and Merrill's First Principles of Instruction, I evaluated the training through survey data from 212 participants and semi-structured interviews with 7 stakeholders. The evaluation addressed seven research questions examining learner expectations, content alignment, perceived quality, confidence development, and transfer to practice.

What emerged was a paradox. The training looked great—professionally produced, interactive, well-received by learners—but it was strategically misaligned with who was taking it. The program assumed all users needed comprehensive platform mastery when four distinct personas showed up with wildly different needs. Full-time webmasters thrived. Teachers managing a single classroom page felt overwhelmed by content they'd never use. The pathway was built for 30-40% of its audience.

The data surfaced other surprises. Participants reported higher confidence in advanced skills than foundational ones—an inverted mastery pyramid that shouldn't happen if learning is progressing normally. This pattern pointed to false confidence built in simplified simulations that didn't prepare users for their actual sites.

The takeaway is that organizational readiness and implementation timing can undermine even well-designed instruction. Recommendations target both the training itself and the broader client success ecosystem that shapes whether learning ever gets applied.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The growth of corporate eLearning has accelerated significantly since 2020, largely attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic, which mandated a rapid transition from in-office work to fully remote arrangements (Buffer, 2022). This shift has since evolved into either hybrid models requiring intermittent in-office attendance or some that remain fully remote (Baker et al., 2021). Because of this, the corporate eLearning sector is anticipated to reach an estimated valuation of nearly $50 billion by 2026 (Nworie, 2023). This projection is supported by research conducted by the McKinsey Global Institute (2021), which indicates a noticeable shift among corporations towards prioritizing training and development initiatives (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021).

Eighty-seven percent of executives believe that learning and development programs have positively influenced their teams' performance (Nworie, 2023). Moreover, 59% of these executives have observed an uptick in employee engagement following the implementation of learning and design development programs (Nworie, 2023). Additionally, 74% of respondents reported that the introduction of online asynchronous trainings has facilitated significant cost savings within their organizations (Dutton, 2018). Notably, over 80% of businesses involved in the survey identified learning and development as a fundamental organizational priority (Dutton, 2018).

Research suggests that well-designed software training programs improve user adoption, proficiency, and long-term engagement (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020). Though organizations increasingly invest in asynchronous online training programs, systematic evaluations of these

initiatives remain limited, particularly in client-facing contexts where external users must master complex software platforms. The education technology sector exemplifies this challenge: companies regularly deploy training programs to thousands of their clients without employing established evaluation frameworks to assess effectiveness, engagement, or learning outcomes (Aggarwal et al., 2021; Jacobs & McEwen, 2021). This evaluation gap is particularly problematic given the substantial financial and operational investments in corporate learning initiatives (Jacobs & McEwen, 2021).

Despite this surge in investment, many corporate training programs lack a strong research foundation and fail to incorporate effective motivational strategies that drive learner engagement (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2023). Organizations frequently develop training programs reactively, in response to immediate business needs, without conducting sufficient research into learner motivation, instructional effectiveness, or engagement strategies (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2023). As a result, many online training initiatives fail to support long-term learning retention or foster meaningful application in the workplace.

Many training programs, especially those designed for clients outside of an organization (such as SaaS platforms or vendor-based training programs), are developed without a structured evaluation model. They are rarely assessed using established frameworks, such as the Kirkpatrick Model or an evaluator-developed logic model and often fail to integrate feedback loops that would allow for continuous improvement (Savaya & Waysman, 2005). Without intentional evaluation, these programs risk becoming static, outdated, and misaligned with the evolving needs of learners.

Statement of the Problem

Finalsite is an educational technology company that specializes in online content management systems for schools and districts worldwide. They are responsible for creating and hosting K-12 school websites with communication tools, and enrollment management for their students. Once a district has purchased Finalsite, new clients need training to understand what the product is and how to use the product. Finalsite's client-facing training is currently housed in a Learning Management System (LMS) that is available to all their clients. The training is 100% online and asynchronous and is designed to help educators and administrators effectively use the company's platform to manage content, communications, and online learning environments. However, there was a lack of structured learning paths, outdated training materials, and a one-size-fits-all approach that created barriers to effective learning for their clients.

Organizational Context: Finalsite and the 2024 Training Redesign

In March 2024, Finalsite initiated the initial phases of a redesign for its online training program. At that time, the courses were all in video format, long, and disorganized. Direct feedback from clients in the form of written feedback indicated that the overall training was lengthy, challenging, and not organized. Therefore, Finalsite employed an instructional designer and a content specialist to redesign their training.

From March to September 2024, the team of two focused on transforming the existing courses into micro-courses by integrating shorter, interactive content to enhance learner engagement. The main objective for this project was to enable the learners to absorb the content

more effectively. The outcomes of this initiative included the creation of approximately 73 micro-courses, 14 learning paths, and about 50 software tutorials.

This program evaluation will focus only on the first and most popular learning path, Composer. Composer is the main product the majority of their clients purchase first. Composer is a drag-and-drop website content management system (CMS) that allows schools and districts to build, edit, and update their websites. It is designed specifically for the K-12 sector.

Program Description: The Composer Learning Path

The main purpose of the Composer learning path is to guide users from initial orientation through to more advanced content management tasks using the Finalsite "Composer" tool. The Composer learning path includes seven short micro courses ranging from 2-5 lessons. Each micro course takes between 10-15 minutes for the learner to complete. They are designed to be completed asynchronously and are not in sequence. The full sequence of the modules in the Composer Learning Path include:

1. **Getting to Know Composer:** This is an introduction course designed for site administrators that are tasked with the creation of pages and who need to configure page settings.
2. **Finalsite Philosophy & the Home Page:** This course teaches users to work with the home page and the concept of updating the Home Page.
3. **Using the Editor:** This course covers how to use the editor to add content, styles to text, hyperlinks, and buttons in the content element.

4. **The Element Library:** This course focuses on how to add elements from the element library and be able to apply common element settings such as using the editor to add content, apply styles to text, add hyperlinks, and insert images.
5. **Page Layouts:** This course is designed to teach users how to layout a page using columns, accordions, and tabs, as well as add navigation elements.
6. **Manage Pages:** This course focuses on how to publish, add, delete, and link pages.
7. **Working with Banners:** This course focuses on how to update header and footers content within banners on site pages.

Purpose of the Study

Although over 7,000 users engage with all Finalsite's training annually, Finalsite has not implemented a systematic method for tracking learner engagement, gathering feedback, or evaluating outcomes. There is no structure for understanding what participants expect to learn, whether they are satisfied, or if they apply what they've learned. Additionally, though every client is paired with a specialist during onboarding, there is little to no follow-up beyond an initial introduction to the LMS. The company provides learning opportunities but lacks a framework for assessing whether those opportunities are effective.

Without systematic tracking, Finalsite lacks the foundation needed to refine its training through iterative, data-informed design. Though software training programs built with intentional instructional design can improve both user adoption and long-term retention (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020), without data-informed updates and feedback from both learners and internal stakeholders, Finalsite risks releasing clients into a training ecosystem that is outdated and

unsupported. This has the potential to undermine platform adoption and client satisfaction and could place strain on support teams as users rely on one-on-one help to fill the gaps.

Moreover, many client training initiatives, including those at Finalsite, lack a theoretical approach that integrates research-based motivational strategies. Studies suggest that user motivation plays a key role in determining the effectiveness of digital training programs (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2023). Yet, organizations rarely consider how motivation mediates training effectiveness, leading to low engagement and retention rates. The absence of structured learning paths, interactive content, and engagement-driven design further limits the effectiveness of online training in professional settings.

At Finalsite, these challenges manifest in outdated course structures, the absence of adaptive or personalized learning paths, and a lack of clear guidance for learners. Without a strategic, research-based training framework, the organization risks reduced adoption rates, client dissatisfaction, and underutilization of its platform. The purpose of this study, then, is to conduct a program evaluation of Finalsite's Composer Learning Path—an asynchronous online training program used by several thousands of educators and administrators across Finalsite's client network worldwide. This study will evaluate how Finalsite's current training programs address—or fail to address—these critical factors and propose evidence-based improvements.

This study uses a mixed-methods program evaluation which includes a large-scale quantitative survey of all learners who have completed any of the seven modules part of the Composer learning path, followed by two sets of semi-structured interviews: one with internal

Finalsite staff involved in training and support, and one with district-level administrators who have adopted the platform.

The evaluation draws on three guiding frameworks: (1) the logic model, to define expected outcomes and components of the training program; (2) Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model, to assess reaction, learning, behavior, and context; and (3) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), to explore the motivational drivers underlying client engagement.

Specifically, this program evaluation will:

- Examine learners' expectations, perceptions, and reported outcomes after engaging with the training.
- Explore how internal staff understand and support the goals of the learning path.
- Investigate how district leaders perceive the value of Finalsite's training when making purchasing decisions.

The goal of this evaluation is to produce actionable, evidence-based recommendations for improving Finalsite's training program—enhancing usability, increasing engagement, and aligning content with user needs.

The Significance of the Study

This evaluation holds significance for multiple stakeholders and contributes to both the practical and scholarly understanding of online training program evaluation. Practically, this evaluation will provide actionable data to inform decisions about the training design, delivery, and development structures. Being able to understand what aspects of the Composer Learning

Path are most effective and which need improvement, the organization can allocate resources strategically and improve client experience. Following the substantial 2024 redesign effort, recommendations will be given about which design changes are most effective, where further refinement is needed, and how training on the features of the Composer Learning Path can continue to evolve to meet user needs.

Moreover, this evaluation will be able to contribute to the limited body of literature on asynchronous training for external users in the Educational Technology sector. Findings from this evaluation may be able to inform the best practices for other EdTech companies designing client training programs, particularly regarding how to evaluate training effectiveness when learners are geographically distributed and vary widely in their roles and technical proficiency.

Evaluation Questions

This program evaluation is organized around the following evaluation questions, which align with the logic model and incorporate elements of process, formative, and summative evaluation:

A. Motivation and Context: What internal and external influences led participants to enroll in and complete the Composer Learning Path?

B1. Expectations and Needs Alignment: What did participants expect or hope to learn before beginning the Composer Learning Path training?

B2. Content Alignment: Did the training content align with participants' expectations and learning needs?

C. Quality and Usability: How did participants perceive the quality and usability of the training experience, including clarity of instruction, ease of navigation, pacing, and relevance to their job responsibilities?

D1. Application of Learning: Did participants apply what they learned to build or update a Composer page?

D2. Features Used: Which specific Composer features did participants use in practice following training completion?

D3. Confidence Development: How did participants' confidence in using Composer change from before to after training?

These questions support both the understanding of program outcomes (summative evaluation) and examination of program implementation and user experience (process evaluation). They also provide formative insights that can inform ongoing program improvement even though the initial redesign has been completed.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study:

- **Asynchronous Courses**: Learning that allows students to engage with course materials, complete assignments, and participate in discussions at their own pace without requiring simultaneous interaction.

- **Motivation**: A psychological construct that serves as the driving force behind individuals' actions and behaviors (Martin et al., 2024).
- **Intrinsic Motivation**: The drive to engage in activities for inherent satisfaction rather than external rewards.
- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**: A macro theory of human motivation suggesting people are driven by an innate need to grow and change (Deci & Ryan, 2008).
- **Autonomy**: The need for choice, control, and self-determination in one's actions (Deci & Ryan, 2008).
- **Competence**: The ability to perform tasks effectively, which enhances motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
- **Relatedness**: The desire to interact, connect, and establish meaningful relationships with others (Ryan & Deci, 2002).
- **Asynchronous training**: Learning that occurs without real-time interaction between instructor and learner, allowing participants to access content at their own pace and on their own schedule.
- **Composer**: Finalsite's drag-and-drop content management system (CMS) that enables K-12 schools and districts to build and manage websites.
- **Formative evaluation**: Ongoing assessment conducted during program implementation to provide feedback for program improvement Bhat & Bhat, 2019).
- **Learning Management System (LMS)**: A software platform used to deliver, track, and manage training content. Finalsite uses Thought Industries as its LMS.

- **Content Management System (CMS):** A software that allows people to create, edit, manage, and publish digital content on a website without needing to know how to code.
- **Learning path**: A structured sequence of courses designed to build skills progressively toward a defined competency or goal.
- **Logic model**: A visual representation of a program's theory of action, showing relationships among inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes (Savaya & Waysman, 2005)
- **Micro course**: A short, focused learning module typically ranging from 10 to 15 minutes in length, designed to address a specific learning objective.
- **Lesson:** A complete, standalone learning unit within a course
- **Process evaluation**: Assessment of how a program is implemented, including examination of fidelity, quality, and participant experience (Bhat & Bhat, 2019).
- **Program evaluation**: Systematic collection and analysis of information about program activities, characteristics, and outcomes to make judgments about the program, improve effectiveness, and inform decisions about future programming (Patton, 2015).
- **Simulation**: An interactive activity that replicates real-world tasks within a safe practice environment, allowing learners to apply skills without risk of errors in production systems.
- **Summative evaluation**: Assessment conducted at the end of a program or program cycle to determine the extent to which intended outcomes were achieved (Bhat & Bhat, 2019).

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

For this program evaluation, understanding online learning environments and the relationship between learner motivation, self-regulation, and successful learning outcomes is essential. This chapter begins by synthesizing research on online learning formats such as course design, methods, learner interaction, and delivery and their impact on learning outcomes is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of corporate asynchronous training programs. From there, this chapter provides an examination of the theoretical frameworks supporting online education.

Multiple theoretical frameworks inform effective online learning design, including cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), adult learning theory (Knowles, 1984), community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2000), and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Each offers valuable perspectives on how learners engage with digital content, develop skills, and apply knowledge in professional contexts. However, this review focuses specifically on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Merrill's First Principles of Instruction (Merrill, 2002) because these frameworks directly address the two central challenges identified in Finalsite's training evaluation: (1) learner motivation and engagement in required professional development, and (2) instructional design effectiveness in promoting skill transfer to workplace application. Self-Determination Theory provides a lens for understanding why externally mandated training often fails to produce lasting engagement, while Merrill's principles offer concrete design criteria for evaluating whether training modules support active learning and real-world application. Together, these frameworks enable systematic assessment of both the motivational climate and instructional quality that determine training effectiveness.

By examining how Self-Determination Theory and the Merill's First Principles of Instruction inform online learning design, this chapter establishes the foundation for understanding what makes corporate online training effective and identifies the gaps in current knowledge that may warrant further investigation.

Definition of Online Learning

At its core, online learning is an educational process where a substantial portion of the content is delivered through the internet (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Though traditional learning environments can offer structured support and real-life interaction, online learning can provide flexibility and accessibility that is able to cater to learner needs in different aspects, such as scheduling issues, learning preferences, and more (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Online learning can be structured in different formats (e.g., synchronous, asynchronous, or hybrid) to cater to different educational needs and preferences. Each of these formats has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Synchronous online learning refers to real-time instruction where students and instructors interact simultaneously through an online platform. This format allows for immediate feedback and discussion among the peers and instructor, factors that can enhance learner engagement (Kolm et al., 2021). For example, web conferencing tools can provide live discussions, presentations, and any other collaborative activities (Ellingson & Notbohm, 2012). The challenge of synchronous online learning is that all students must be available at the same time. Additionally, research has identified that engaging in multiple tasks during synchronous virtual classes such as listening to the instructor, viewing slides, processing information, reading the chat, can increase cognitive load and potentially lead to "Zoom fatigue" (Bailenson, 2021; Chiu,

2023). These scheduling and cognitive demands can create barriers to participation for some students, limiting the inclusivity and accessibility of purely synchronous formats.

In contrast, *asynchronous* online learning allows students to access the course at their own pace with no real-time interaction. The flexibility provided by this format attempts to accommodate learners who may have busy schedules. However, the lack of immediate interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and may hinder the development of a supportive learning community (Cadapan et al., 2022). Studies have shown that although asynchronous formats can be effective, student success requires strong self-regulation and motivation (Jong et al., 2012).

Hybrid (also known as blended learning) learning formats combine elements from both synchronous and asynchronous learning, letting learners experience the benefits of both. Some aspects may be in person or in synchronous formats, while others may involve solely asynchronous online activities. Blended learning formats can enhance learner performance by providing opportunities for face-to-face interaction and hands-on experiences alongside online resources (Liu et al., 2016). This format can be particularly effective in fields that require practical skills, allowing for a more comprehensive educational experience (McCutcheon et al., 2014). For example, if the training includes "practical test your knowledge" components, learners might complete theoretical modules and assessments online at their own pace, then participate in online, collaborative sessions where they apply gained knowledge through simulations or hands-on activities.

Historical Context

The evolution of online education has undergone a significant transformation from its early roots in distance learning to the contemporary digital platforms that dominate today's educational landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a rapid shift to online modalities, solidifying online education as a critical component of global learning experiences (Wang & Lee, 2025).

Early Distance Learning

Distance learning has a rich history that predates modern technology by several centuries. The beginning of distance learning can be traced back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when learning materials were mailed to students through postal correspondence courses. The first documented distance learning course appeared in 1728 when Caleb Phillips, a shorthand teacher in Boston, advertised in the Boston Gazette that students could receive weekly lessons by mail and, "be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston" (Sleator, 2020). This model gradually grew as technology advanced and postal systems became more reliable and widespread (Tao, 2024).

By the mid-19th century, distance education had gained institutional recognition. The University of London became the first university to offer distance learning degrees when it established its External Programme in 1858, allowing students throughout the British Empire to study for university degrees without leaving their hometowns (Ferrari, 2020; Pittman, 2023). In the United States, the growth of correspondence education accelerated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The University of Chicago established the first university-based distance education program in the United States in 1892 under the direction of William Rainey Harper

(Britannica, 2008). By 1890, the Colliery Engineer School of Mines created correspondence courses on mine safety, which evolved into the International Correspondence School serving iron, railroad, and mine workers. By 1923, this institution enrolled 2.5 million students (Sleator, 2020).

The introduction of the Internet in the 1990s marked a pivotal moment for distance education, facilitating the development of more interactive and engaging online learning platforms. Learning Management Systems (LMSs) emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. LMSs were able to provide structured environments for course delivery, assessment, and learner engagement (Palvia et al., 2018). This period laid the groundwork for integrating multimedia resources, enabling educators to create more dynamic and interactive learning experiences (Swe & Bhardwaj, 2023).

The practical implementation of online learning began to take shape in the mid-1990s with the development of mobile devices. In 1994, Mitsubishi Electric Corporation launched the IBM Simon, widely recognized as the first smartphone, which laid the foundation for mobile learning technologies (Advance HE, 2024). However, online learning did not gain widespread traction until the mid-2000s, when technological advances converged with evolving pedagogical theories. The launch of transformative mobile devices including the iPhone in 2007, Android operating systems in 2008, and the iPad in 2010 catalyzed exponential growth in mobile learning adoption (Advance HE, 2024). These devices offered powerful functionality including multimedia capabilities, social networking integration, communication tools, and GPS location services that could be leveraged for educational purposes.

Technological advancements have transformed the accessibility and delivery of education, enhancing learning experiences and addressing systemic barriers. The integration of mobile technology, artificial intelligence (AI) and information and communication technology (ICT) have played a pivotal role in reshaping educational experiences, especially in developing countries and during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hashim & Hamidon, 2022).

Raja and Nagasubramani (2018) highlight that modern technology has revolutionized education, making knowledge acquisition more enjoyable and accessible. The ability to utilize mobile devices for learning purposes has been critical in expanding educational opportunities, especially in remote areas where traditional educational infrastructure may be lacking. Learners can take their learning wherever they are (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018).

A study on online teaching during the pandemic revealed that technology significantly impacted learning, allowing for continuity in education despite physical distancing measures (Cutillas & Hermosisima, 2023). However, it also exposed the digital divide, where students from marginalized backgrounds faced barriers to participation due to inadequate access to technology and internet connectivity (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). This underscores the necessity for inclusive pedagogical approaches that consider students' diverse backgrounds and resources.

Moreover, the role of assistive technology in promoting inclusion cannot be overlooked. Lyner-Cleophas (2019) emphasizes that assistive technologies are crucial for fostering an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. Assistive technologies have been able to enhance their educational experiences and provide students with disabilities with more resources.

In conclusion, while some of these technological advancements have significantly improved the accessibility and delivery of education, it is essential to address the accompanying

challenges to ensure that all learners can benefit from these innovations (Dhawan, 2020). The interplay between technology and educational equity remains a critical area for ongoing research and policy development, particularly considering the disparities highlighted during the pandemic.

Necessary Components in the Design of Online Corporate Professional Development

Online learning environments have gained traction due to their flexibility and convenience to be able to cater to different learners. Online training programs also allow organizations to deliver tailored training that meets specific needs (Jagtap et al., 2024). According to Polushkina (2021), online training has transformed professional development and made it more accessible and manageable for employees. The flexibility in online training lets corporate learners integrate learning on their own time which is particularly valuable in corporate organizations.

This shift toward online professional development has been, in part, driven by the need for organizations to adapt within an evolving online environment. As workplaces increasingly adopt hybrid models that blend remote and in-office work, organizations are shifting their professional development programs to online formats to accommodate this distributed workforce. Because online learning has become a huge educational component in today's corporate world, we must understand the necessary building blocks in the design of online environments that make these learning experiences successful. The literature points to several core components that, when designed and implemented well, can determine whether learners are able to achieve meaningful skill development and behavior change.

These components include course design, instructor, presence and support, peer interaction, assessment and feedback, technology, as well as learner readiness and self-regulation (Diaz, 2020).

A. Clear Learning Objectives

The foundation of any online course is the course design. Effective course design should incorporate clear learning objectives, structured content delivery, and engaging instructional strategies. Effective online learning begins with a well-structured design that aligns the learning objectives with the appropriate content and delivery methods (Chirikov et al., 2020).

Having well-defined goals enhances motivation and helps learners understand the purpose of their training, which is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation ("Developing an Instrument to Assess Information Technology Staff Motivation", n.d.). Establishing clear learning objectives is essential for participants in a training program (Kolm et al., 2021). These objectives should articulate what learners are expected to achieve by the end of the course. Clear objectives also provide a framework for assessing learning outcomes (Kolm et al., 2021)

B. Instructor Support

Instructor presence and support can have a different meaning in online training contexts. According to Martin and colleagues (2019), instructors play a critical role in planning and delivering courses, establishing learning objectives, and integrated learning strategies. In some instances, it is also important for learners to have access to their instructor throughout the course for questions and/or any other support they may need (Reeves et al., 2017).

C. Interaction

Interaction is a vital component of online learning, influencing learner engagement and satisfaction (Reeves et al., 2017). Interaction is essential for most online courses and can be defined as anything that keeps the learners engaged throughout the course. This could include any scenarios, critical thinking questions, knowledge check questions, and anything that can get the learner to respond back to the course almost immediately (Reeves et al., 2017).

D. Collaboration

Collaboration among people is even more necessary in online courses because of the absence of face-to-face interaction which can lead to feelings of isolation (Kolm et al., 2021). Collaboration in online learning environments allows students to work together towards common goals, facilitating active learning, and a deeper understanding of course content. Collaborative learning not only enhances academic performance but also promotes essential skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving (Reeves et al., 2017; Ohara, 2023). For instance, Reeves et al. highlight that e-learning methods can still foster a sense of collaborative community among participants, which is particularly beneficial in interprofessional education settings (Reeves et al., 2017).

Collaboration tools can include discussion forums, and collaborative software such as Google Docs, and Slack to let students communicate, and even share resources as a group. The integration of these tools into online courses can enhance learner engagement and create a more interactive learning environment (Kolm et al., 2021).

E. Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and feedback are essential for monitoring learner progress and providing opportunities for improvement in online learning. A variety of assessment methods, such as quizzes, assignments, and projects, can be used to evaluate learner understanding and skills. Timely and constructive feedback is crucial for helping students identify areas of strength and weakness and improve their performance (Belfo & Sousa, 2011).

Online learning platforms offer various tools for assessment and feedback, such as quick knowledge checks, automated grading systems and online rubrics. These tools can streamline the assessment process and provide students with immediate feedback on their work (Belfo & Sousa, 2011). Instructors can also use online platforms to provide personalized feedback through comments, audio recordings, or video messages. Adaptive assessments, which adjust the difficulty level based on learner performance, can further personalize the learning experience and provide targeted feedback. This personalized approach, combined with timely and constructive feedback, can significantly improve learner performance in online learning environments.

Regular assessments and feedback are crucial for measuring participants' understanding and progress. Implementing formative assessments, such as quizzes and self-reflections, allows learners to gauge their comprehension and identify areas for improvement (Belfo & Sousa, 2011). Additionally, providing timely and constructive feedback can reinforce learning and motivate participants to continue developing their skills (Belfo & Sousa, 2011).

F. Flexibility and Accessibility

An effective online training program should be flexible and available to accommodate the diverse needs of participants. This includes offering content that can be accessed at any time and on various devices, allowing learners to progress at their own pace. Flexibility is particularly important in EdTech, where learners may have varying schedules and commitments ("Developing an Instrument to Assess Information Technology Staff Motivation", n.d.).

G. Learner Readiness and Self-Regulation

Learner readiness and self-regulation are crucial factors in online learning success. Online learners need to be self-directed, motivated, and able to manage their time effectively (Cadet, 2021). They also need to possess the necessary digital literacy skills to navigate online platforms and tools. Learners' level of familiarity with online course design, layout, materials, and technical aspects of online learning can significantly influence their success (Sebuliba, 2021). A conducive study environment where the learning takes place is also important for effective online learning (Serttas & Kasabali, 2020).

Institutions and instructors can support learner readiness and self-regulation by providing clear expectations, resources, and support services. Orientation programs and online tutorials can help students develop the necessary skills and strategies for online learning. Regular check-ins and communication from instructors can also provide encouragement and support. Learner motivation is another crucial factor, as it influences students' engagement and persistence in online courses.

Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Online Education

Understanding these core components such as clear objectives, interaction, feedback, flexibility, provides a practical checklist for what effective online training should include. However, knowing what to include does not fully explain why these elements matter or how they work together to support learning. This requires examining the underlying theoretical framework that explains what drives learner motivation, engagement, and skill transfer.

Out of many that could be chosen, two frameworks seem particularly relevant for this study: Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which explains the psychological needs that drive human motivation, and Merrill's First Principles of Instruction (Merrill, 2002), which provides a blueprint for effective instructional design. Self-Determination Theory explains the psychological mechanisms underlying motivation, clarifying why certain design choices foster engagement while others inadvertently undermine it. Together, these frameworks informed the 2024 redesign of Finalsite's Composer Learning Path and provide the conceptual foundation for evaluating its effectiveness. Merrill's First Principles of Instruction provides concrete design strategies grounded in decades of instructional design research, offering a blueprint for structuring effective learning experiences (Frick et al., 2009; Gardner, 2011).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and its Relevance to Online Education

Self-determination theory is a psychological theory that focuses on human motivation and personality. It posits that individuals have three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (Ryan & Deci, 2017). These needs are essential for fostering intrinsic motivation, which is crucial for effective learning and personal growth (Scogin &

Stuessy, 2015). In the context of online education, understanding and addressing these needs can significantly enhance learner engagement and motivation (Yang et al., 2022)

The relevance of considering SDT to online education is underscored by the unique challenges and opportunities presented by digital learning environments, due to the unique ways in which the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are present in online environments. Specifically, online courses often provide greater flexibility and autonomy, allowing students to choose when and how they engage with course materials. However, the lack of face-to-face interaction can hinder the fulfillment of relatedness, making it essential for educators to implement strategies that support all three psychological needs (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

The first basic psychological need highlighted in SDT is that of autonomy. Autonomy refers to the need for choice, control, and the ability to determine one's actions (Deci & Ryan 2008). It empowers individuals by giving them a sense of power and helps align their actions with their values and interests. Individuals driven by autonomy are more likely to engage in activities and experience a sense of well-being (Sheldon et al., 2000). When individuals can choose activities that hold meaning for them, they tend to experience levels of satisfaction (Ryan & Deci 2017). It provides people with a feeling of power thereby making their actions congruent with their values and interests. People motivated by free will are more likely to do what they want and enjoy a feeling of well-being (Sheldon et al., 2000). People tend to be satisfied when they can choose activities that mean something to them (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

This is because autonomy in learning gives students the power to create their own objectives and allows them to direct their learning. In an academic setting, when the students feel

like they have autonomy, they are more likely to have self-directed learning, create their own goals, and engage in self-regulated learning behaviors (Shrol & Poliukhovych, 2021). According to Shrol and Poliukhovych, (2021), when students are asked to learn new content, autonomy should almost be a prerequisite for the learning to be effective. These findings also align with Vosoogh (2021), who showed that a positive classroom environment that encouraged autonomy increased students' educational motivation.

Autonomy is a key concept in a learning environment that may significantly influence students' motivation, engagement, and performance in learning environments. If learning environments can support autonomy, there is a higher chance that students' intrinsic motivation can also increase along with their academic performance.

The second psychological need highlighted in SDT is competence. Competence refers to the need to feel capable and effective in one's activities (Ryan & Deci, 2021). People who perceive themselves as competent are more likely to be motivated and engaged therefore, this can produce better outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2017). When people perceive themselves as competent in tasks, they are more likely to participate and engage When individuals feel competent, they feel skillful and as if they can effectively master challenges (Edmunds et al., 2006; Nyuhuan, 2024). However, mastering challenges does not mean that individuals must reach the highest level of proficiency. It is more about individuals to have the skillset to engage motivation from within to develop expertise in a certain skill or field.

Supporting competence presents particular challenges when designing online learning environments. Without an instructor present to adjust difficulty in real-time or provide

immediate clarification, training must be designed to prevent learners from getting stuck. This might involve interactive simulations where learners can practice without fear of breaking anything, clear progress indicators that show skill development, and embedded support resources learners can access when needed to support their competence needs (Abuadas, 2022). Students in supportive online learning environments developed stronger perceptions of their competence, which in turn predicted better performance (Abuadas, 2022). The same principle applies to online professional development trainings: when the learning environment is structured to help users feel increasingly capable, they're more likely to persist through challenges and ultimately apply skills successfully.

Relatedness is the third fundamental psychological needs proposed by SDT. It refers to the desire for individuals to interact, connect, and establish meaningful relationships with others (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The need for relatedness can also exist in various domains of life, including family, friendships, romantic partnerships, and work relationships.

Research shows that when learners feel socially connected—to instructors, peers, or a broader learning community—they engage more actively and experience greater satisfaction with their learning (Ng et al., 2012). Conversely, feelings of isolation predict disengagement and dropout. For asynchronous training where learners never meet in real-time, supporting relatedness requires creative approaches: discussion forums, peer feedback mechanisms, opportunities to see how others are applying skills, or even well-crafted content that adopts a warm, conversational tone that makes learners feel addressed as individuals rather than anonymous users (Chirkov et al., 2003).

In corporate training contexts, relatedness may also be supported through connections to one's professional identity and organizational community. Learners who feel their training connects them to colleagues facing similar challenges, or who see training as part of their professional growth within a valued organization, may experience relatedness even in the absence of direct social interaction during the course itself (Blackie et al., 2012).

Three Needs Working Together

Though these psychological needs are often described separately, SDT emphasizes that all three must be satisfied for optimal motivation (Pourebrhami et al., 2013). Research has shown that unmet needs are negatively related to variables such as self-esteem, hope, and quality of life (Pourebrhami et a., 2013). As Gussen et al. (2023) note, autonomy without structure can lead to confusion and decreased competence perceptions, while structure that supports skill development enhances both competence and the confidence to work independently—which further supports autonomy. In a study done in a healthcare setting, unmet needs were associated with increased risk of hospitalization and morbidity (Ercin-Swearinger & Lapham, 2022). These unmet needs also were shown to decrease health, quality of life, and had an increased risk of mortality (Ercin-Swearinger & Lapham, 2022)

For online training design, this means evaluation cannot focus on isolated features but must consider how design decisions collectively support or undermine these psychological needs. A training program might offer excellent autonomy through flexible scheduling, but if learners feel incompetent because content is poorly scaffolded or feel isolated because there's no sense of community, overall motivation will suffer. Effective training design requires intentionally addressing all three needs through coordinated design choices.

Merill's First Principles of Instructions

Merill's First Principles of Instruction (MFPI) serves as a foundational framework in the field of instructional design (Merrill, 2002). This framework emphasizes task-centered learning methodologies to help engage learners. This framework is composed of five core principles: authentic problem identification, activation of prior knowledge, demonstration of skills, application of knowledge, and integration of new skills (Merrill, 2002).

The first principle is problem-centered learning. This principle posits that instruction should begin with authentic problems that learners are likely to encounter in real-life examples. This approach fosters critical thinking but also motivates learners to allow them to see the relationship and relevance of the learning to the real world (Merrill, 2002). Naser et al. (2023) demonstrated that structuring engineering coursework around authentic design challenges, where students identified real community problems, designed solutions, tested prototypes, and refined their work. This aligned with Merrill's problem-centered principle and significantly increased student engagement and knowledge retention compared to traditional lecture-based instruction. This task-centered approach, validated in technical education contexts, translates directly to corporate software training where learners similarly need to perform authentic workplace tasks rather than absorb abstract concepts.

The second principle, activation of prior knowledge, asserts that new learning is more effective when it is linked to what learners already know (Margaryan et al., 2015). By activating this existing knowledge, educators can create a stronger relationship between the new knowledge and the prior knowledge (Frick et al., 2009). This principle was applied in studies where designers created courses that required learners to reflect on their previous experiences and

connected them to new concepts, thereby enhancing their learning trajectories (Melo et al., 2022).

The third principle, demonstration of skills, emphasizes that learners benefit from observing how tasks are performed before attempting them (Jalilehvand, 2016). Effective demonstrations help learners visualize the application of knowledge and skills which can lead to improved performance when they practice those skills (Melo et al., 2022).

Application of knowledge is the fourth principle, which urges learners to actively practice their new skills in an environment where feedback is provided (Jalilehvand, 2016). This principle emphasizes the importance of experiential learning through hands-on activities, which is critical for learning new skills (Chen at al., 2024). By engaging in practical application and receiving feedback in an environment, learners can better internalize new content and gain confidence in their abilities (Melo et al., 2022).

Lastly, the integration of learning focuses on learners incorporating new knowledge into their everyday roles. This principle encourages reflection on learning and application beyond the classroom. It supports the phenomena of solidifying knowledge through real-world practice and fostering a lifelong learning mindset (Gardner, 2011). For example, Yorganci (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of MFPI in flipped classrooms, where students engage in activities that promote incorporation of learned skills into academic and personal settings. This view of learning ensures that learners not only acquire knowledge but also use the new knowledge in different contexts (Badali et al., 2016).

In conclusion, Merrill's First Principles of Instruction is a comprehensive framework that promotes different learning strategies to ensure instruction is relevant and practical. Academic

learning may focus on knowledge, while corporate training exists so people can do their jobs better. Merrill's First Principles of Instruction addresses this directly.

Implications for Evaluating Corporate Training

SDT provides a lens for understanding why certain training features matter beyond their obvious practical functions. For instance, interactive simulations do not just provide practice opportunities, they support competence by allowing risk-free experimentation and autonomy by letting learners explore at their own pace. Clear learning objectives don't just organize content, they support competence by helping learners gauge progress. Optional peer discussion forums don't just add interactivity; they support relatedness by connecting learners to a community.

When evaluating Finalsite's Composer Learning Path, SDT suggests specific questions to explore: Do learners feel they have meaningful control over their learning process? Do they perceive themselves as increasingly capable as they progress through training? Do they feel connected to a broader community of users, or isolated in their learning? By incorporating SDT alongside Merrill's design principles, this evaluation can assess both whether training follows instructional design best practices (MFPI) and whether it fosters the psychological conditions necessary for sustained motivation (SDT).

Evaluating Training Program Effectiveness

The theoretical frameworks discussed above provide guidance for designing effective online training. However, good design intentions do not guarantee good outcomes. Even if training is built on theoretical grounds, training can fail if implementation is flawed, the content

does not match the learner's needs, or if there are other contextual factors that may create barriers to application. This is why program evaluation becomes essential.

Organizations invest substantial resources in training, yet many lack systematic methods for determining whether those investments yield results (Jacobs & McEwen, 2021). Evaluation provides the evidence needed to make informed decisions about continuing, revising, or discontinuing programs. However, evaluation must extend beyond simple satisfaction surveys. Comprehensive evaluation examines multiple dimensions of program success: whether training was implemented as intended, whether participants learned what was expected, whether they apply new skills in their work, and ultimately whether those applications produce desired organizational outcomes.

Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Evaluation Model, developed in the 1950s, remains the most widely recognized framework for evaluation (Yoon et al., 2016; Gao et al., 2018). The model structures evaluation around four hierarchical levels: Reaction (how participants respond to training), Learning (what knowledge, skills, or attitudes changed), Behavior (whether participants apply learning in their work), and Results (organizational outcomes attributable to training). Each level builds on the previous one, with higher levels representing stronger evidence of training impact but also greater evaluation complexity.

For this study, I adapted Kirkpatrick's framework to address the specific context of asynchronous client-facing software training. The evaluation focuses primarily on Levels 1-3, which are most feasible to assess given the timeline and scope of this study:

Level 1: Reaction assesses participants' immediate responses to training—their satisfaction with content, delivery format, and overall experience. Though sometimes dismissed as merely a "smile sheet," reaction data provides important insights into whether training meets learner expectations and whether design choices (like interactive simulations versus video lectures) resonate with users. For the Composer Learning Path, reaction measures include ratings of training clarity, relevance, pacing, and format, as well as open-ended feedback about what worked well or needs improvement.

Level 2: Learning examines whether participants acquired intended knowledge and skills. This level addresses the fundamental question of whether training taught what it aimed to teach. For software training, learning outcomes include both conceptual understanding (e.g., knowing when to use specific features) and procedural skills (e.g., being able to execute tasks). In this evaluation, learning is assessed through self-reported confidence changes, participants' descriptions of what they learned, and their demonstrated understanding of how to apply specific Composer features.

Level 3: Behavior determines whether participants transfer learning to their actual job contexts. This is arguably the most critical level for corporate training, since knowledge that remains unused represents failed investment. Behavior change is assessed through self-reported application of learned skills, descriptions of specific ways participants have used Composer independently since training, and interviews with internal staff who support clients and can observe application patterns. Importantly, this level also examines barriers to application—participants may learn successfully (Level 2) but face organizational or contextual obstacles that prevent application.

Level 4: Results evaluate organizational-level outcomes like improved productivity, reduced support costs, or enhanced website quality. Though these long-term impacts are the ultimate goal, this evaluation cannot definitively measure Level 4 outcomes within its timeframe and due to the dispersion of outcomes across multiple school contexts. However, data collected at Levels 1-3 can provide early indicators of whether training is positioned to contribute to desired results. For instance, if clients report increased independence and confidence, this suggests eventual reductions in support ticket volume—a key organizational goal for Finalsite.

This multi-level approach recognizes that training effectiveness cannot be determined by any single measure. High satisfaction means little if participants didn't learn; successful learning means little if skills aren't applied; and application must ultimately contribute to meaningful outcomes. By examining multiple levels, this evaluation provides a comprehensive picture of how well the redesigned training is working.

Moreover, program evaluations typically fall into three categories based on timing and purpose. Formative evaluation occurs during program development to inform ongoing improvements. Summative evaluation occurs after implementation to determine whether a program achieved intended outcomes. Process evaluation examines how a program is implemented, focusing on fidelity, quality, and participant experience (Othman et al., 2010; Silva et al., 2023).

This evaluation combines process and summative approaches. As a summative evaluation, it assesses whether the redesigned Composer Learning Path achieved its goals: Did it improve alignment between training and learner needs? Did participants develop intended

competencies? As a process evaluation, it examines how learners experience the training: Is the delivery format effective? Are interactive simulations more engaging than previous video-based approaches? Do learners understand how to navigate the learning path?

This dual focus reflects the practical reality that Finalsite needs both accountability data (Did the redesign work?) and actionable feedback (What are some improvements that would help?). The combination of survey data, open-ended feedback, and semi-structured interviews enables both types of insights, providing evidence of outcomes while also surfacing the contextual factors and implementation details that explain those outcomes.

Using a Logic Model as an Evaluation Framework

Logic models provide visual representations of program theory, how a program is expected to produce desired outcomes (Savaya & Waysman, 2005). By mapping relationships among inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, logic models clarify assumptions about how programs work and help evaluators identify potential gaps between intended design and actual implementation. For this evaluation, the logic model serves three key functions: it articulates Finalsite's theory of change for the Composer Learning Path, it guides data collection by identifying which outcomes to measure, and it provides a framework for interpreting findings.

Table 2.1

Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes	Evaluation / Data Collection
- Finalsite LMS platform (Thought Industries) - Trainers/Subject Matter Experts - Asynchronous training modules - Administrative support - Client organizations (participants)	- Clients access asynchronous modules - Internal staff create and maintain content - Periodic communication and updates to clients	- Number of trainings accessed - Completion rates - Feedback collected from clients	- Clients understand how to use platform tools - Increased confidence in using the LMS - Clients apply LMS features independently	- Decreased client support tickets - Increased engagement with platform tools - Higher client satisfaction and retention	**Formative Evaluation:** - Real-time feedback from clients - Internal revision logs of training modules **Process Evaluation:** - Semi-structured interviews with staff - Surveys with clients on training effectiveness - LMS usage analytics - Training completion data

Program Inputs and Activities

The logic model for this evaluation begins with foundational inputs: the LMS platform that hosts content, subject matter experts (SMEs) who developed course content, the instructional designer who structured learning experiences, and client organizations whose staff participate in training. These inputs enable program activities: designing and delivering the seven-module Composer Learning Path, creating interactive simulation-based tutorials, administering quarterly live webinars as optional support, and collecting user engagement metrics through the LMS.

The evaluation examines these activities through both quantitative and qualitative data. LMS analytics reveal which modules are completed and how long learners spend on different activities. Survey items about training clarity, usability, and format assess whether delivery

methods are effective. Interview data provides deeper insight into how learners experience these activities—what works well, what's confusing, and what barriers they encounter.

Short-Term Outcomes

Immediate outputs include the number of courses accessed, completion rates, and frequency of interaction with key features like simulations. These metrics indicate program reach and engagement but don't confirm whether meaningful learning occurred. Therefore, the evaluation also examines short-term outcomes including increased learner confidence, perceived alignment between training content and professional responsibilities, and positive reactions to training format and quality. Survey questions addressing these outcomes include confidence ratings (before and after training), assessment of content relevance to learners' roles, and evaluation of training design elements like pacing and clarity.

Medium-Term Outcomes

Medium-term outcomes focus on behavioral application: Are clients independently using Composer features to build and manage website pages? Are they making informed decisions about content organization? Are they revisiting training modules when they encounter new challenges? These application outcomes are central to the evaluation because they represent the bridge between learning and organizational impact. If learners complete training but never apply skills independently, training has failed regardless of high satisfaction scores or confidence gains.

Application is assessed through multiple data sources. Survey respondents indicate whether and how they've applied learned skills. Open-ended responses provide specific examples of application. Interviews with Finalsite staff who support clients reveal observable patterns in how trained versus untrained clients approach problems. Together, these sources illuminate not just whether application is occurring, but also what factors facilitate or hinder it.

Long-Term Outcomes and Organizational Impact

Although this evaluation cannot definitively measure long-term organizational outcomes—like sustained reductions in support ticket volume or measurably improved website quality—it can identify early indicators suggesting whether training is positioned to produce these results. For instance, if clients report feeling significantly more independent and confident, this suggests eventual decreases in support needs. If they describe specific ways they're using Composer more effectively, this suggests improved website management over time.

The logic model also acknowledges external factors that may influence outcomes independent of training quality. For example, districts with dedicated technology coordinators may see better skill application than districts where staff juggle multiple roles. Schools with more resources may provide staff more time for professional development. By collecting contextual information through surveys and interviews, the evaluation can account for these factors when interpreting results.

Chapter Summary and Research Gaps

This chapter established the foundation for evaluating Finalsite's Composer Learning Path by synthesizing research on online learning, instructional design, and training evaluation.

Effective online learning requires alignment among learning objectives, content, activities, and assessments, grounded in learning theories that explain how design choices impact motivation and engagement.

Two theoretical frameworks informed both the 2024 training redesign and this evaluation. Merrill's First Principles of Instruction provides concrete design strategies: beginning with authentic problems, activating prior knowledge, demonstrating skills, providing application opportunities, and supporting integration into practice (Merrill, 2002, 2013; Frick et al., 2009). Self-determination theory explains the psychological mechanisms underlying motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Together, these two frameworks clarify why certain design features matter and provide criteria for evaluating whether implemented training adheres to research-based principles.

However, good theoretical grounding does not guarantee successful implementation. This is where systematic evaluation becomes essential. Kirkpatrick's model structures evaluation around four levels (reaction, learning, behavior, and results) each providing different evidence of training impact (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The logic model developed for this study traces how program inputs and activities are expected to produce short-term learning outcomes, medium-term behavioral application, and ultimately long-term organizational benefits.

Despite extensive research on online learning and instructional design theory, there are still some significant gaps. Most research on online learning focuses on traditional academic contexts rather than corporate training environments. Corporate training often occurs without systematic evaluation, meaning organizations invest heavily on client training without evaluating the intended outcomes. Client-facing training is when the organization delivers training to their

customer base and not to the employees of its organization. There is very little research on client-facing training and the unique challenges it comes with. Asynchronous software training has received very little research attention despite it being so common.

This evaluation addresses these gaps by examining a real-world implementation of asynchronous, client-facing software training in an educational technology context. It asks practical questions that matter to practitioners: Did the redesigned training actually work? Did it meet learner needs? What worked well and what needs improvement? Are learners applying learned skills? By grounding the evaluation in established frameworks while focusing on an understudied context, this study contributes both to Finalsite's continuous improvement efforts and to broader understanding of what makes corporate asynchronous training effective.

The following chapter describes the mixed-methods approach used to answer these questions, with the data collection procedures, participant samples, and analytical strategies designed to provide comprehensive trustworthy evidence about the Composer Learning Path's effectiveness.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study employs a program evaluation design to systematically assess the effectiveness, implementation, and outcomes of Finalsite's Composer Learning Path. Program evaluation, as a methodological tradition, differs from basic research in its primary orientation toward practical decision-making and program improvement rather than theory testing or knowledge generation (Patton, 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The central questions driving this evaluation—Did the training work? For whom? Under what conditions? What should be changed?—reflect this utilization-focused orientation.

In March 2024, Finalsite initiated the initial phases of a redesign for its online training program. At that time, the organization offered approximately 40 courses that included recorded webinars, videos, and written content. Prior to COVID-19, these courses were mostly done face to face with trainers travelling around to the clients.

Continuous feedback from clients indicated that the overall training was perceived as lengthy, unengaging, and challenging to navigate or search through effectively. This approach was driven by external feedback from clients indicating that users felt overwhelmed by the content in the courses since they were very long and included long videos. The decision came from the Client Education Team based on the feedback that they were getting. In response to these concerns, Finalsite employed an instructional designer (myself) and a content specialist to assist in revamping their training offerings. Following a brief needs assessment, the team was tasked with redesigning courses and incorporating additional software simulations that would allow clients to engage with the examples directly as if they were in the software.

From March to September 2024, the team of two individuals (an instructional designer and a content specialist) focused on transforming the 40 existing courses into micro-courses, integrating various interactive elements to enhance learner engagement. The primary objective for 2024 was to deconstruct the content into manageable segments, enabling learners to absorb the material more effectively rather than overwhelming them with multiple topics within a single course. The outcomes of this initiative included the creation of approximately 73 micro-courses,14 learning paths, and 50 software tutorials.

This program evaluation focused specifically on the "Composer" learning path—Finalsite's most widely used learning path of asynchronous training. The Composer learning path is the Content Management System (CMS) that clients use for their schools. The Composer learning path was chosen after several discussions with Finalsite's internal training team, including instructional designers, trainers, and client success managers, who emphasized that this series of courses is foundational for nearly all users new to the Finalsite Content Management System (CMS). Internal data confirmed that the Composer learning path consistently saw the highest enrollment and completion rates across client districts, reinforcing its relevance for this evaluation.

Focusing on this particular learning path also reflects practical and strategic considerations. Composer serves as the first step for most new clients to build competence in using Finalsite tools effectively. In addition, all courses in this learning path were significantly updated during Finalsite's 2024 redesign, which introduced new interactive content such as simulations, chunking information together, and simplifying content. Evaluating these specific

modules offers the opportunity to assess both the effectiveness of the redesign and the extent to which users are engaging with new instructional approaches.

Composer is the drag-and-drop website content management system (CMS) that allows schools and districts to easily build, manage, and update their websites. It is designed specifically for educational institutions, with features that prioritize ease of use, branding consistency, and communication. The Composer path includes seven short, modular micro courses, designed to be completed asynchronously and in sequence. Each course is between 10-15 minutes long and can include video tutorials, practice activities, flashcards, or interactive software simulations. The purpose of the path is to guide users from initial orientation through to more advanced content management tasks using Finalsite's Composer tool.

The full sequence of the modules in the Composer Learning Path include:

1. **Getting to Know Composer:** This is an introduction course designed for site administrators that are tasked with the creation of pages and who need to configure page settings.
2. **Finalsite Philosophy & the Home Page:** This course teaches users to work with the home page and the concept of updating the Home Page.
3. **Using the Editor:** This course covers how to use the editor to add content, styles to text, hyperlinks, and buttons in the content element.
4. **The Element Library**: This course focuses on how to add elements from the element library and be able to apply common element settings such as using the editor to add content, apply styles to text, add hyperlinks, and insert images.

5. **Page Layouts:** This course is designed to teach users how to layout a page using columns, accordions, and tabs, as well as add navigation elements.
6. **Manage Pages:** This course focuses on how to publish, add, delete, and link pages.
7. **Working with Banners:** This course focuses on how to update header and footers content within banners on site pages.

Table 3.1

Composer Learning Path Module Descriptions

Module	Description	Learning Objectives
Getting to Know Composer	Introduction course for site administrators who create pages and configure page settings.	• Navigate the CMS platform. • Locate production and instruction branches. • Configure and apply page settings.
Finalsite's Philosophy & the Home Page	Course covering homepage concepts and dynamic updating.	• Understand do's and don'ts of working with the homepage. • Understand dynamic updating with modules.
Using the Editor	Course on using the editor to add and style content, hyperlinks, images, and buttons.	• Add styled content. • Insert images. • Add hyperlinks and buttons.
The Element Library	Course on adding elements and applying settings.	• Add elements from the element library. • Apply common element settings.
Page Layouts	Course teaching layout design using columns, accordions, tabs, and navigation.	• Create page layouts using multiple element types. • Add navigation elements.
Manage Pages	Course on publishing, adding, deleting, and linking pages.	• Publish pages. • Add, delete, clone, and move pages. • Link pages.
Working with Banners	Course on editing header/footer content within banners.	• Locate where banners are configured. • Edit header/footer links. • Update location information. • Apply banners to pages.

Focusing on Composer for this study as a starting point in an evaluation of all new instructional modules will allow this evaluation to remain targeted yet meaningful—providing insight into user confidence, content clarity, and application of skills that are directly tied to the everyday tasks users perform on the Content Management System (CMS) also called Composer. Together, these data points will help assess both the process of course delivery and learner engagement, as well as the summative outcomes tied to learner confidence, content mastery, and readiness to apply skills in their school settings.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach to program evaluation, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, was utilized to gain a comprehensive understanding of the training program's effectiveness. This evaluation consisted of mainly of process and summative evaluations, with some formative evaluation potential:

1. **Process Evaluation** – This assesses how the training program operates internally, examining implementation fidelity, participant engagement, and instructional quality (Clinton &Hattie, 2024).
2. **Summative Evaluation** - Summative evaluation is defined as an assessment that takes place at the end of an educational program or module, aimed specifically at determining the extent to which students have achieved certain learning outcomes. The primary purpose of summative evaluation is to gauge knowledge retention and application after instruction has concluded (Clinton &Hattie, 2024).

3. **Formative Evaluation** - Although the training has already been redesigned, I still see value in including a formative component in this evaluation. Even though the micro courses are already live, the feedback I collect can directly inform future improvements. I want to understand where clients are still getting stuck, what's working well, and what they'd like to see added or changed. That kind of input is important not just for reporting outcomes, but for making the training better over time. Though this isn't a typical formative evaluation that happens during course development, it's still formative in the sense that I'm using participant feedback to help guide next steps and improvements moving forward.

This design was a **mixed-methods design** combining a broad-based quantitative data collection and analysis with open-ended questions survey employing two sets of semi-structured qualitative interviews with internal Finalsite staff and members of district administration (e.g., principals of schools who use Finalsite products). I am interested in determining why learners want to take more online training and what keeps their interest. I also wanted to inquire why the district administrators chose Finalsite and what they were expecting from their employees while taking the training. This leads to mixing rationale to help extend the range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry purposes (Greene et al., 1989). Initial data were gathered from quantitative surveys with end users of the training materials consisting mainly of school personnel and form the dominant portion of this evaluation study. Qualitative interview data were used to supplement the quantitative findings to dig deeper into engagement strategies and learner motivation (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Research Setting

This program evaluation study is situated within the context of Finalsite's client-facing asynchronous training environment. The setting of this study is the Finalsite Learning Center that is housed in Thought Industries. Thought Industries (TI) is the Learning Management System (LMS) that houses its library of newly designed micro courses, simulation-based training, and structured learning paths designed to support users in adopting and effectively utilizing the Finalsite Content Management System (CMS) for their communication and instructional needs. On average, approximately 1,154 unique users access the training system each month, reflecting a broad and diverse population of K–12 professionals, including teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, and district communication teams.

The research setting is distributed and virtual, reflecting the asynchronous, remote-access nature of the training experience. Participants complete training independently, typically from their schools or homes, with no live facilitation. Surveys were distributed through an online platform, interviews were conducted via Zoom, and LMS data was accessed through Finalsite's internal analytics systems on Thought Industries (TI), with permission from the organization. No identifying quantitative information was collected from any end user, which resulted in quantitative data being anonymous. IRB authorization was obtained for using both the secondary data analysis of the quantitative data owned by Finalsite for this evaluation and the non-anonymized semi-structed interview data collected during the evaluation process.

LMS Data

Thought Industries provides a robust amount of LMS data that can support both processive, formative, and summative evaluations in this program evaluation. Standard learner

progress data includes module-level metrics such as active users; total time spent per module. These data points can be used to evaluate engagement patterns and identify modules that may be too long, too short, or causing user drop-off. The platform also tracks learner progress percentages, which can highlight where users tend to disengage or stop progressing, and supports analysis of navigation paths to understand how learners move through the training experience.

These LMS analytics, especially when linked to survey data or user roles, provide a detailed picture of how the training is functioning, how it is experienced by different learners, and where there may be opportunities for improvement.

Quantitative Survey

The survey instrument was grounded in three different sources: (1) client feedback collected during the 2024 training redesign, (2) the specific learning objectives for each of the Composer module, and (3) and evaluation frameworks including Kirkpatrick's model and Self-Determination Theory.

The final instrument consisted of approximately 120 items organized into nine distinct sections. The survey opened with a demographics section collecting information about participants' roles, years of experience in education, school type and location, and comfort level with web-based platforms. The second section addressed motivation for taking the training, including both multiple-choice items about external requirements and intrinsic interest, as well as open-ended questions about timing and personal goals.

The third section focused on expectations and learning needs prior to training, using a multiple-response checklist of anticipated skills (e.g., creating pages, managing navigation, understanding accessibility) plus an open-ended prompt for additional goals. The fourth section

captured module participation patterns and estimated time investment. The fifth section assessed content alignment through both Likert-style satisfaction items and open-ended explanations.

Section six measured quality and usability perceptions using 5-point Likert scales (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) across dimensions including ease of navigation, clarity of instruction, relevance to role, pacing appropriateness, and likelihood to recommend. This section also included items assessing autonomy, competence, and relevance—constructs drawn from Self-Determination Theory that informed our understanding of learner motivation and engagement. The remaining sections (seven through nine) consisted of module-specific question sets.

The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete depending on the number of modules a participant had finished. The complete survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

Participants

The participants included individuals enrolled in the online training courses for Finalsite. However, to gain the depth of understanding required to fully implement the software within their professional educational contexts—whether in classrooms, school offices, or district communications—they are required to complete this more comprehensive online training program. Participants included but were not limited to teachers, principals, administrators, and other support staff. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach, which is a recommended strategy in program evaluation studies aiming to assess program quality and user experience (Patton, 2015). This approach was appropriate given the study's dual focus on process evaluation, which examines how the training program is being implemented and experienced,

and summative evaluation, which investigates whether the program has achieved its intended outcomes (Royse et al., 2010; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011).

Inclusion Criteria

The following participants were eligible for this study if they met the following conditions:

- Current Finalsite clients (administrators or team members who actively use Composer to manage website content).
- Those who have completed at least one micro course from the Composer Learning Path micro course series during the designated data collection period (May 2024 to early April 2025).
- Those who voluntarily chose to participate in the survey and/or interview portion of the evaluation.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded from the study if:

- They had not completed any part of the Composer Learning Path micro courses.
- They were involved in the instructional design, development, or delivery of the 2024 training redesign (to avoid potential bias).
- They were not active users of the Composer platform (e.g., support staff, interns, or leadership not involved in site management).
- They declined to give consent or chose to skip the survey/interview.

Sampling Strategy

May 2024 is when the newly designed Composer Learning Path was released. Approximately 2100 participants have accessed the Composer Learning Path since May 2024 (with approximately 650 completing all seven modules), and survey participants were recruited from this total population.

Participants included a diverse cross-section of school personnel who use Finalsite in their professional roles. These included classroom teachers, site or district administrators, instructional technology staff, communications officers, and other support personnel. Approximately 74% of training participants were teachers who manage Finalsite classroom websites. These users were essential to this evaluation, as they represent the largest user group and interact directly with the platform to facilitate classroom communication and instructional access.

A substantial number of participants also represented administrative and support roles. These users relied on Finalsite for broader institutional communication, including sending school-wide announcements, managing district updates, and overseeing public-facing website content.

Procedures

In order to comprehensively evaluate the Finalsite Composer Learning Path, this study utilized a **mixed-methods design** combining a broad-based survey, two sets of semi-structured qualitative interviews, and LMS data. This design supports the explanatory sequential approach by first gathering patterns from a large sample from the learners (via survey) and then diving deeper into context, motivations, and interpretation through interviews. This approach aligns

with summative, process evaluation and formative (to a lesser degree) goals: identifying what is working, for whom, and why.

Survey of All Learners

The first phase of data collection involved a survey distributed to all users who have completed the Finalsite Composer Learning Path from May 2024 to April 2025. The survey was administered electronically, via direct link depending on client accessibility, and included a combination of multiple-choice, Likert-style, and open-ended questions. The goal of the survey was to be able to capture patterns across a large and diverse sample of learners, representing the different roles such as instructional staff, administrative staff, communications personnel, and teachers. The survey collected data related to training expectations, user satisfaction, confidence shifts, real-world application, and perceived usability of the learning path. It also included questions regarding their motivation for participating, module completion behavior, and their training usage of Composer features (e.g. Section 10 in the survey)

We chose to recruit and administer the survey to all participants who have taken at least a portion of the Composer Learning Path since its inception—not a sample—because our primary goal is to surface broad themes and variability across the entire learner population. This inclusive strategy helped ensure high variation and increase the reliability of quantitative patterns, particularly when disaggregating by role or job function.

Note, the survey used the term "confidence" rather than the theoretically precise constructs of "competence" (from SDT) or "self-efficacy" (from Bandura's social cognitive theory) as a deliberate methodological choice driven by the client-facing nature of this

evaluation. Pre-testing of survey items with Finalsite staff and pilot participants revealed that "competence" and "self-efficacy" were unfamiliar terms that created confusion or prompted requests for clarification. "Confidence," by contrast, was immediately understood by participants across all role types and education levels.

Throughout this dissertation, I use "confidence" when reporting participant responses and survey data, reflecting the language participants actually encountered. In theoretical discussion and interpretation, I connect these findings to the constructs of perceived competence and self-efficacy, recognizing that the measured construct shares conceptual space with both. This approach prioritizes fidelity to the actual measurement while maintaining theoretical grounding in the interpretation.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Internal Finalsite Staff

To supplement the survey findings and better understand implementation decisions and perceptions of learner needs, we conducted semi-structured interviews with internal Finalsite staff. These participants included individuals that were directly involved in designing, maintaining, or supporting the Composer Learning Path—such as instructional designers, client success managers, or product trainers.

Semi-structured interviews provided a methodological framework that facilitated in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives while maintaining topical coherence through predetermined inquiry domains. This approach enabled systematic data collection across key research foci, including participants' conceptualizations of learner expectations, client feedback

mechanisms and content, their assessments of training pathway efficacy and limitations, and supplementary guidance provided to clients navigating the online learning environment.

Sampling Strategy (Internal Staff)

Participants were purposefully selected using criterion sampling meaning they were chosen based on their direct involvement in supporting or delivering the Composer training path. I interviewed three district administrators and four internal staff members. The internal staff members included the content expert involved in the 2024 redesign, two client education specialists, and one sales leader. The internal staff were invited to participate via direct outreach and were provided with a clear explanation of the study purpose, confidentiality measures, and their voluntary participation.

This internal perspective was critical for the process evaluation aspect of this study, helping to answer questions about how the training is functioning internally, how decisions were made during development, and how implementation may vary across clients.

Sampling Strategy (District Administrators)

District administrators were selected using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. I worked in collaboration with Finalsite's client services team to identify recent adopters who are actively using Composer and are willing to discuss their purchasing decision and post-adoption impressions. I interviewed 7 participants in total.

Interview invitations were distributed via email, and participants will receive a consent form outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and their voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Semi-Structured Interviews with District Administrators

The second round of qualitative interviews targeted district-level administrators who are the decision-makers on choosing Finalsite as their program for their districts and/or schools. The intention behind these interviews is to understand the purchasing rationale: What needs or goals are they hoping to address by selecting Finalsite? How do they perceive the value of the training path as part of the broader platform? And what do they consider when evaluating its success for their staff? What do they want their staff members to be able to do from the trainings?

This qualitative data supported the formative and summative evaluation goal of understanding external motivations and contextual factors that influence how the training is adopted and utilized. It also ties back to the logic model by exploring how organizational needs drive engagement with the learning path.

Qualitative Data Analysis

All interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim. Following transcription, each participant received a copy of their interview transcript for member checking—a process that allowed them to verify accuracy, clarify statements, or provide additional context before analysis began. Three participants returned transcripts with minor clarifications, which I incorporated before coding.

I analyzed interview data using thematic coding informed by the evaluation questions and theoretical frameworks guiding this study. Analysis began with reading all transcripts in their entirety to develop familiarity with the data. I then conducted initial open coding on the first three transcripts, generating descriptive codes that captured participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors related to training effectiveness. These initial codes were refined and organized into a preliminary codebook with clear definitions and example quotes.

Using this codebook, I systematically coded all remaining transcripts, adding new codes as needed when emergent themes arose that weren't captured in the initial framework. Codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories aligned with the evaluation questions: learner expectations and needs, content alignment and relevance, training quality and delivery, confidence and learning outcomes, application to practice, organizational context and motivation, and implementation experiences. Throughout this process, I wrote analytic memos documenting patterns, contradictions, and connections between codes.

To establish analytical rigor and reduce potential bias from my dual role as designer-evaluator, a second coder with expertise in instructional design. We met twice to compare coding, discuss discrepancies, and reach consensus on code application and boundaries. The second coder's perspective was particularly valuable in identifying instances where my insider knowledge might have led me to make assumptions rather than code what participants explicitly stated.

I managed codes using Atlas TI and an Excel spreadsheet to track code frequency, participant attribution, and thematic relationships. After all transcripts were coded, I created summary tables showing which themes appeared in internal staff versus district administrator

interviews, allowing me to identify convergent and divergent perspectives across stakeholder groups.

When presenting findings in Chapter 4, I used direct quotations to illustrate themes while ensuring quotes were representative of broader patterns rather than isolated outliers. For each major finding supported by interview data, I verified that the claim was substantiated by multiple participants or triangulated with survey results. This approach guarded against cherry-picking quotes that confirmed my expectations while ignoring disconfirming evidence.

Internal staff interviews (n=4) provided insider perspectives on program implementation, design rationale, and observed client behaviors. These interviews informed evaluation questions related to quality perceptions (B), application of learning (C1, C2), and provided implementation context for understanding expectation alignment (A1, A2). District administrator interviews (n=7) captured external perspectives from organizational decision-makers, directly addressing motivation for participation (D) while also providing crucial context for learner expectations (A1), organizational definitions of training success, and real-world evidence of application (C1). Together, the two interview sets enabled triangulation with survey data and provided explanatory depth that quantitative measures alone could not capture.

Timeline

Data collection for this evaluation will begin in mid-April and run for approximately three weeks, wrapping up in early May. During that time, survey responses were gathered from clients who recently completed the Composer Learning Path micro courses. Simultaneously, interviews were scheduled and conducted within that same window. Once data collection was

completed, I moved into the analysis phase, including reviewing both quantitative data from the surveys and qualitative feedback from open-ended responses.

Evaluation Question A1: What did participants expect or hope to learn before beginning training?

This question explores learners' initial expectations and perceived learning needs prior to beginning the Composer Learning Path. This question also supports the logic model's assumption stage: what users believe they need is a foundational input that shapes how they engage with the program. It sets the baseline for being able to understand satisfaction, alignment, and outcomes.

Evaluating learner expectations is an essential question within the formative evaluation framework because it provides context for interpreting whether the training is aligned with learners' goals. We are not just interested in what users learned—but whether what they *needed or wanted* to learn was included in the training in the first place. To answer this, the survey included a multiple-response checklist of possible goals that could be addressed within the Composer learning progression (e.g., creating pages, embedding images and videos, understanding accessibility best practices, customizing layout), plus an open-ended text box for participants to describe any other goals they had. As examples, the survey asked *I learned how to: Confidently navigate through the CMS platform, I learned how to: Locate and understand how to configure and apply page settings*, with responses on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5.

Evaluation Question A1 was addressed through Survey Section 3 (Expectations & Needs), which asked participants what they expected or hoped to learn before beginning training. Quantitative analysis included frequency counts and percentages for each expectation category selected from the multiple-choice checklist (e.g., "How to create a webpage," "How to upload images"). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for any Likert-scale items related to pre-training familiarity or anticipated difficulty.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses used open coding to identify emergent themes in participants stated goals beyond the provided checklist options. Responses were grouped into thematic categories (e.g., technical skill needs, conceptual understanding needs, role-specific tasks). Themes appearing in at least 5% of responses were reported as patterns.

Interview data supplemented survey findings by revealing organizational expectations. District administrator interviews addressed what competencies districts prioritized when enrolling staff in training (Interview Questions 5-6). Internal staff interviews captured the expectations they routinely heard from clients during onboarding (Interview Questions 3-4). Interview transcripts were coded for expectation-related statements and compared with survey patterns to identify alignment or divergence between individual learner expectations and organizational goals.

Evaluation Question A2: Did the training content align with participants' expectations and learning needs?

This question seeks to understand whether the Composer Learning Path delivered on the learners' goals. It is important to understand whether or not the participants are interacting with

the content they perceive is necessary to meet their goals. Evaluation Question A2 examined alignment between what participants expected to learn (from Question A1) and whether the training content delivered on those expectations. This was assessed through Survey Section 5 (Content Alignment), which asked "Did the training content meet your expectations or needs?" with response options: Yes / Somewhat / No.

Quantitative analysis calculated frequency distributions and percentages for each response category overall and disaggregated by participant role (teacher, administrator, communications staff) to identify whether certain groups experienced greater misalignment. Cross-tabulation compared participants stated pre-training expectations (from Section 3) against their alignment ratings to identify which specific expectations were met versus unmet. For example, participants who selected "learn to create pages" as an expectation were cross tabulated with their alignment rating to determine what percentage felt that expectation was fulfilled.

Qualitative analysis of the follow-up open-ended prompt ("If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain") used thematic coding to categorize types of misalignments. Codes included "content too basic," "missing advanced features," "wrong role focus," "timing disconnect," and "technical gaps." Any theme mentioned by 10+ participants was reported as a pattern.

Interview data provided implementation perspectives on alignment. District administrator interviews (Questions 11-12) revealed whether training met organizational needs that prompted Finalsite adoption. Internal staff interviews (Questions 3-5, 8) captured feedback patterns about content gaps and areas where expectations exceeded reality. Interview codes were compared with survey themes to identify convergent evidence of misalignment."

Evaluation Question B: How did participants perceive the quality and usability of the training experience?

This question will investigate how participants perceive the quality and usability of the training experience. The “quality" refers to how well the training content and experience are designed, structured, and delivered. For example, Was the training *well designed and clearly delivered*? "Usability" focuses more on the technical and logistical side of the learner experience—how easy it is for them to navigate and interact with the training system and content. Was it easy to access and navigate?

This question is critical for maintaining high learner satisfaction and equity in training delivery. Even if the training covers the right topics, it may fall short if the delivery is confusing, disorganized, or not adapted to the needs of different user roles. We will use Likert-scale items to measure multiple dimensions (e.g., “The instructions were easy to follow”; “The content was relevant to my role”). These types of questions will be under each course’s section.

Analysis will come from a mix of survey questions asking directly about clarity and relevance and from open-ended comments about clarity and relevance. Average scores for those scaled questions along with standard deviations, coupled with responses to open-ended questions highlighting what felt helpful or confusing in the training modules will be used to answer the question. Themes in the data related to whether they felt the examples and content made sense for their day-to-day work will be highlighted

Analyzing this data helps identify pain points in the user experience that could hinder engagement or effectiveness. Responses will be disaggregated by role (e.g., district comms staff

vs. school-based users) to assess whether certain groups face more usability challenges than others.

Internal staff interviews were particularly valuable for this question, as staff could describe the quality feedback they routinely received from clients, patterns in usability complaints or praise, and how quality was monitored post-launch. Staff also provided context about design decisions that shaped the user experience. District administrator interviews captured indirect quality perceptions through the feedback administrators received from their staff members about training clarity, relevance, and ease of use.

Evaluation Question C1: Did participants apply what they learned to build or update a Composer page?

In order to assess behavioral outcomes, this question examined whether participants applied what they learned to build or update a site page in Composer. It asks participants to reflect on whether they have used what they learned to perform Composer-related tasks. The purpose of this question is to evaluate whether they can transfer their knowledge and skills over to their day-to-day activities for their job.

Participants will respond to a question one whether they have created a page in Composer(Yes/No) and will be asked to provide a brief example/URL of a page they built or updated. This is a crucial question because application of learning is the bridge between training and results—if learners do not apply what they learned, even high-quality content won't create the impact training is intended for. We want to be able to see if they have applied what they learned from the learning path to their own pages.

Findings from this question help determine whether the learning path is not just informative but actionable. It also allows us to assess short-term behavioral outcomes and can signal whether additional post-training support or job aids might be needed to promote transfer of learning.

Internal staff interviews provided observational evidence of application, as staff could describe behavioral changes, they noticed in how clients used Composer post-training such as increased independence, more sophisticated page designs, or reduced support requests for basic tasks. District administrator interviews addressed application from a supervisory perspective, revealing whether administrators observed staff building or updating pages differently after completing training and whether this met organizational expectations for website management.

Evaluation Question C2: Which Composer features were used in practice?

Building on evidence of application, this question identified which specific Composer features participants used in practice. While C1 establishes whether learners applied their knowledge, C2 digs deeper to identify which components they used in practice. This information is especially important for linking course content to real-world behavior.

Responses to the survey about the specific tools and components participants used after training, such as page editor, navigation tools, banners, or accessibility features. Specific features of users' websites will be analyzed and percentages of individuals including specific features learned in the Composer modules will be analyzed to determine which features of the training were used in practice.

Internal Finalsite staff interviews supplemented survey self-reports by revealing which features generated the most post-training support requests or questions, suggesting which components were attempted but not fully mastered. Staff could also identify features that clients confidently used without assistance after training, providing behavioral validation of feature adoption.

Evaluation Question C3: How did participants' confidence change from before to after training?

This question measured how participants' confidence in using Composer changed from before to after training. Confidence is a powerful measure of learning efficacy and a known predictor of future application (Bandura, 1997). This question ties into Kirkpatrick Level 2: Learning, but in a more affective, self-efficacy-focused way.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Confidence was assessed through module-specific survey questions asking participants to rate their confidence both before and after completing each module. Each module section (Sections 6-12) included two items:

- "Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?"
- "After completing this module, how confident were you in this topic?" (same scale)

Statistical analyses included:

- **Descriptive statistics** (means and standard deviations) for pre-training and post-training confidence ratings for each module
- **Paired-samples t-tests** to determine whether confidence gains were statistically significant at the module level
- **Effect size calculations (Cohen's d)** to quantify the magnitude of confidence change
- **Frequency distributions** showing the percentage of participants who reported confidence gains (moved up at least one level), no change, or confidence decreases
- **Cross-tabulation** of confidence changes by participant role and prior familiarity to identify whether confidence gains varied by learner characteristics

Confidence gains were calculated by subtracting pre-training ratings from post-training ratings for each participant. Positive values indicated confidence improvement, zero indicated no change, and negative values indicated confidence decline.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Open-ended survey responses throughout module-specific sections were coded for spontaneous mentions of confidence, comfort, independence, or anxiety. Codes included "increased confidence," "still uncertain," "need more practice," and "ready to apply independently." Responses mentioning confidence shifts in 5+ participants were analyzed as patterns.

Interview Data Integration

Internal staff interviews (Questions 10-11) contextualized confidence patterns by describing how client interactions changed post-training—whether clients asked different types of questions, seemed more willing to troubleshoot independently, or expressed less anxiety about using Composer. Staff were asked to describe behavioral indicators of confidence they observed in support interactions.

District administrator interviews (Question 10) addressed confidence indirectly through observations about whether staff seemed more independent and self-sufficient in managing website content after training. Administrators described changes in staff members' willingness to attempt tasks without assistance or escalate fewer routine issues to IT support. Interview transcripts were coded for confidence-related themes and compared with survey patterns to identify convergent evidence.

Evaluation Question A: What internal and external influences led participants to take the Composer Learning Path?

The final evaluation question investigated what internal and external influences led participants to take the Composer learning path. Motivation variables include whether the training was required, recommended, or self-initiated. This is a categorical variable collected via multiple-choice survey item. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize trends in participant motivation.

Cross-tabulations with participant role and experience level will help uncover patterns (e.g., administrators may assign training, while self-motivated users may be more common among tech-savvy staff). We will get technology experience levels from our survey. The expected finding is that most users took the training as a requirement or recommendation, though some may have participated out of curiosity or personal development goals.

This question was answered by the data from the semi-structured interviews with the district administrators. LMS data will be used to capture time spent per module, the number of participants, and the most popular courses at Finalsite. Variables include total time-on-task, number of modules completed, and module-level progression.

Descriptive statistics summarized average completion rates and time spent. It was anticipated that users will most commonly complete 3–5 modules, with variability based on role and job demands. Themes in open-ended responses to questions where participants explain why they took training will also be analyzed.

District administrator interviews were the primary qualitative source for this question, directly addressing purchasing rationale, implementation requirements, and how training participation was communicated to staff (required vs. optional). These interviews revealed organizational factors that shaped whether participation was internally motivated or externally mandated. Internal staff interviews provided patterns in enrollment timing and client-reported motivations, helping distinguish between districts that required training systematically versus those where participation was self-selected.

Positionality Statement

My role as both the lead instructional designer of the Composer Learning Path redesign and the evaluator of that same program represents a distinctive methodological position that warrants explicit discussion. Rather than framing this dual role primarily as a limitation requiring mitigation, I approach it as a form of practitioner-researcher positionality that offers both unique advantages and requires appropriate methodological safeguards.

This insider perspective provided several analytical advantages. My direct involvement in design decisions meant I understood the intended logic behind instructional choices such as why simulations were structured in ways, what problems specific design decisions aimed to solve, and where the design team had faced constraints or made compromises. This contextual knowledge enabled more nuanced interpretation of participant feedback. When users struggled with specific features, I could distinguish between implementation failures (the design didn't work as intended) and design limitations (the design worked as intended but the intent was flawed). Similarly, my ongoing relationships with Finalsite stakeholders facilitated access to internal perspectives and organizational context that an outside evaluator might not have obtained.

This positionality also created interpretive risks that required systematic attention. Awareness of my investment in the redesign's success meant I needed to actively guard against confirmation bias—the tendency to emphasize findings that validated design decisions while minimizing critical feedback. To address this, I implemented several methodological safeguards. Survey instruments were developed collaboratively with a researcher external to Finalsite who had expertise in assessment design and no stake in particular findings. All qualitative coding was

conducted with a second coder who had expertise in instructional design but no involvement in the Composer program, with inter-rater reliability calculated and disagreements resolved through discussion. Interview transcripts were shared with participants for member checking, providing opportunities to correct misinterpretations. Finally, I deliberately sought disconfirming evidence throughout analysis, actively looking for patterns that challenged rather than supported the redesign's effectiveness.

The practitioner-researcher tradition in educational research recognizes that insider knowledge and outsider objectivity represent complementary rather than opposing values (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The goal is not to eliminate researcher perspective but to make it visible, leverage its advantages, and implement appropriate checks on its risks. This evaluation reflects that tradition.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

One of the key assumptions in this study is that participants are responding honestly and thoughtfully to the survey questions. Because this evaluation relies heavily on self-reported data, I'm trusting that participants will accurately reflect their experiences with the training, including what they found helpful and what didn't work. Another assumption is that the data collected during the three-week period is representative of the larger group of Composer users who completed the training.

In terms of delimitations, this study is focused specifically on clients who completed the Composer Learning Path micro courses. It does not include those who participated in earlier

versions of the training or who learned Composer through other formats like live webinars or support documentation.

A key limitation is the dual role I hold as both a contributor to the training content and the evaluator. Though I've built in safeguards to remain as objective as possible, I acknowledge that this connection may still shape how I interpret the data. Another limitation is that I may not have access to all backend usage data due to system access or privacy restrictions, which could limit how much behavioral data I can cross-reference against survey responses.

Conclusion

The significance of ongoing evaluation of training programs is crucial for ensuring that these programs remain effective and aligned with organizational goals. Continuous assessment allows organizations to adapt their training initiatives to meet the evolving needs of both clients and employees. This adaptability is vital in a rapidly changing work environment, where the relevance of skills can shift dramatically due to technological advancements, market dynamics, and organizational restructuring.

One of the primary reasons for ongoing evaluation is to measure the effectiveness of training programs in achieving desired outcomes. Research indicates that systematic evaluations are essential for understanding the impact of training on individual and organizational performance (Ruiz et al., 2020; Sucharitha, 2024). For instance, evaluations can identify whether learners are applying their knowledge in training to their daily tasks, thereby enhancing overall productivity and workplace harmony (Asadi et al., 2022). Furthermore, regular feedback

mechanisms can help trainers refine their approaches and content, ensuring that the training remains relevant and engaging for participants (Anderson et al., 2022).

Moreover, ongoing evaluation facilitates the alignment of training programs with organizational goals. As organizations evolve, their strategic objectives may change, necessitating adjustments in training content and delivery methods (Shakib, 2024). For example, a study highlighted the importance of aligning training programs with the specific needs of the organization to maximize their effectiveness (Shakib, 2024). By continuously assessing training outcomes against organizational goals, companies can ensure that their investment in client training development translates into tangible benefits, such as improved performance and employee satisfaction (Berg et al., 2023).

Additionally, ongoing evaluation fosters a culture of continuous improvement within organizations. When employees see that their feedback is valued and acted upon, it enhances their engagement and commitment to the training process (Anderson et al., 2022). This participatory approach not only improves the training experience but also encourages employees to take ownership of their development, leading to better retention of skills and knowledge. For instance, programs that incorporate regular check-ins and refresher courses have been shown to significantly enhance skill retention and application in the workplace (Mantell et al., 2022; Mokhele, 2023).

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the contemporary workplace, exacerbated by challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the necessity for ongoing evaluation. The pandemic has forced organizations to rethink their training strategies, often shifting to virtual formats that require new evaluation metrics to assess effectiveness (Worley et al., 2020).

Continuous evaluation in this context helps organizations identify gaps in training delivery and content, allowing for timely adjustments that can enhance learning outcomes and employee performance (Worley et al., 2020).

In conclusion, ongoing evaluation is a critical component of effective training programs. It ensures that training remains relevant, aligns with organizational goals, fosters a culture of continuous improvement, and adapts to the changing needs of the workforce. By prioritizing evaluation, organizations can maximize the impact of their training initiatives, ultimately leading to enhanced employee performance and organizational success.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the reports from a mixed-methods program evaluation of the Composer Learning Path training program offered by Finalsite. The analysis includes quantitative survey data (N=212) and qualitative interview data (N=7) to address the evaluation questions examining training expectations, quality, outcomes, and contextual factors.

This chapter presents findings organized into four major sections. First, I establish participant context by examining who enrolled in the training, their professional roles and responsibilities, and the organizational settings they represent (Evaluation Question A). Second, I analyze whether the training aligned with learner needs by comparing pre-training expectations against content coverage (Evaluation Question B). Third, I evaluate training quality through participant satisfaction ratings, perceived relevance, and usability feedback (Evaluation Question C). Finally, I will assess learning outcomes such as knowledge gains, confidence development, and the critical question of whether participants reported applying learned skills in their work contexts (Evaluation Questions D1, D2, and D3). Throughout, I integrate the quantitative survey data (N=212) and qualitative interview data (N=7) to provide a comprehensive picture of the Composer Learning Path's effectiveness. Where findings reveal problems, I distinguish between issues attributable to training design versus external implementation barriers, which is critical for determining appropriate remedies.

Participant Context and Motivation

Understanding who enrolled in the Composer Learning Path and why they needed training provides essential context for interpreting all subsequent findings. Kirkpatrick and

Kirkpatrick (2016) emphasized that participant characteristics and organizational contexts fundamentally shape training expectations, engagement patterns, and outcomes. A training program cannot be evaluated in a vacuum; what constitutes "effective" training depends entirely on who is being trained, for what purposes, and under what constraints.

This section addresses Evaluation Question A: *What internal and external influences led participants to enroll in and complete the Composer Learning Path?* It is critical to understand the motivational and contextual factors to help provide the foundation before interpreting the findings. Understanding learner expectations is fundamental to evaluating the effectiveness of training programs. This analysis examines what participants hoped to learn and whether the training met those needs. As shown in Table 4.1, the survey data revealed that 69.8% (n=148) reported "not familiar at all" with Composer before training. There were only 3.3% (n=7) that indicated that they were "very familiar." This data indicated that the training was serving a predominantly novice audience that had almost no knowledge of Composer.

Table 4.1

Pre-Training Familiarity with Composer

Familiarity Level	*n*	%
Not familiar at all	148	69.8
Slightly familiar	23	10.8
Moderately familiar	7	3.3
Very familiar	7	3.3
Extremely familiar	2	0.9

Professional Roles and Responsibilities

Next, let's investigate the different participants' professional roles. The largest group identified were “Communications/Web Staff,” followed by administrative support roles (Table 4.2). The results suggest that the communications (42%) and non-technical administrative staff (34%) suggests that the participants expected practical, job-function training. Based on an interview with a District Communications Coordinator, it is clear that the participants brought in a different number of technical skills just based on their job roles. The Communications Coordinator stated:

> *"The challenge is getting them to understand the website world... teachers are not webmasters. They're not trained in website design or graphic design."*

Training that may have been designed for technical learners may not match the needs of part-time website maintenance with content-update-only responsibilities.

Table 4.2

Participant Roles (N = 212)

Role Category	*n*	%
Communications or Web Staff	89	42.0
Other (Admin/Support roles)	72	34.0
District-level Leadership	23	10.8
Classroom Teacher	21	9.9
School Administrator	16	7.5
Instructional Support Staff	10	4.7
Principal/Assistant Principal	4	1.9

Note. Percentages exceed 100% because multiple selections were allowed.*Note: The "Other" category (n=47, 22.2%) comprised 44 distinct role descriptions including administrative support staff (secretaries, administrative assistants, n=8), library staff (librarians, media specialists, n=5), technology coordinators and IT staff (n=7), human resources personnel (n=4), and various other support roles including purchasing specialists, registrars, and food service staff (n=23). While some subcategories had sufficient sample sizes for analysis, the high degree of role heterogeneity within "Other" and the small sample sizes for individual position titles (many with n<3) precluded meaningful role-based comparisons within this category. See Appendix X for complete list.*

Organizational Context

The next step involves understanding the organizational contexts in which participants work, as this helps interpret their training needs and constraints. This section will examine the type of institutions, community settings, and then the geographic locations represented in the sample from the survey (n=212).

Table 4.3

Institution Type Distribution (N = 212)

Institution Type	*n*	%
Public School District	173	81.6
Private/Independent School	21	9.9
Charter School	7	3.3
Other Educational Organization	13	6.1

As shown in Table 4.3, the majority of participants came from public school districts, indicating a need for the training to align with the content and practices relevant to public education. This can include diverse learner populations, limited technology budgets in comparison to private/charter schools, and accountability to school boards. On the other hand, there was a smaller representation of independent/private schools (9.9%) in comparison to public schools (81.2%) and charter schools (3.3%).

External Motivation Dominates

This brings us back to our evaluation question: What internal and external influences led participants to enroll in and complete the Composer Learning Path? Understanding why participants enrolled in the training is critical for interpreting engagement and outcomes especially through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The survey data revealed that the majority of participants were externally motivated. They were required to enroll in courses due to their jobs rather than personal interest.

As shown in Table 4.5, the top two reasons for enrollment were both external: "Required to use Composer for my role" (46.2%, n=98) and "Required to complete the training" (26.9%, n=57). Combined, 73.1% of participants enrolled because they had to, not because they wanted to. Only 24.5% (n=52) cited intrinsic motivation such as "Wanted to improve my web design skills" or "Curious about platform capabilities" (13.2%, n=28).

Table 4.4

Reasons for Enrolling in the Composer Learning Path (N=212)

Reason for Enrollment	*n*	%	Motivation Type
Required to use Composer for my role	98	46.2	External
Required to complete the training	57	26.9	External
Wanted to improve my web design skills	52	24.5	Intrinsic
Recommended by supervisor/colleague	38	17.9	External (social)
Needed to troubleshoot specific issues	31	14.6	Identified regulation
Curious about platform capabilities	28	13.2	Intrinsic
Preparing for new responsibilities	23	10.8	Identified regulation
Other	12	5.7	Mixed

Note: The motivation categories in this table represent participants' primary self-reported reasons for enrollment rather than pure motivation types along the SDT continuum. Most participants likely held multiple motivations simultaneously, and motivation type may shift during a learning task as learners encounter success, frustration, or new relevance (Deci & Ryan, 2008). A participant who began training due to a mandate might develop genuine interest upon discovering useful features. The categorization captures participants' dominant motivation at enrollment, recognizing this represents a simplified snapshot. Future research could employ rank-ordering of motivation sources to create more nuanced motivation profiles.

This external motivation pattern matters. Research on Self-Determination Theory shows that externally motivated learners often struggle with self-paced learning because they lack the intrinsic drive to persist through challenges (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When 73% of participants are

completing training because they have to rather than want to, engagement becomes fragile and completion requires either very clear extrinsic incentives (deadlines, accountability) or exceptional instructional design that generates interest despite initial reluctance.

Importantly, this external motivation pattern reflects the reality of workplace learning contexts rather than a failure of training design. Unlike academic settings where intrinsic motivation is typically the gold standard, corporate and professional training operates within organizational structures that necessarily involve external requirements, role expectations, and accountability systems. The presence of external motivation should not be interpreted as a barrier to effective learning.

Self-determination theory distinguishes between different forms of extrinsic motivation along a continuum of internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). At one end, external regulation involves compliance with external demands without personal endorsement. At the other end, integrated regulation occurs when external requirements become fully assimilated with one's sense of self and values. The goal for workplace training is not to eliminate external motivation—which is often neither possible nor desirable—but rather to support the internalization process whereby externally mandated training becomes personally meaningful.

The data suggest that external motivation, when paired with appropriate organizational supports, can produce effective learning outcomes. Participants who were required to complete training but also received timely site access, role-appropriate content, and opportunities for immediate application reported outcomes comparable to those with primarily intrinsic

motivations. The problem arose not from external motivation per se, but from the absence of conditions that support internalization: unclear relevance to role responsibilities, misaligned timing between training and application opportunities, and lack of autonomy in selecting appropriate content pathways.

Time Investment: How Long They Spent

The amount of time participants invested in training varied considerably, reflecting both the self-paced nature of the learning path and potentially different levels of engagement or need. Most participants (42.3%, n=89) reported spending between 1-2 hours on the complete Composer Learning Path, while 28.6% (n=61) spent 30 minutes to 1 hour (Table 4.6). Only 15.1% (n=32) invested more than 2 hours, and 14% (n=30) completed the training in less than 30 minutes.

Table 4.5

Time Spent on Training (N = 212)

Time Spent	*n*	%
Less than 30 minutes	30	14.2
30 minutes to 1 hour	61	28.8
1–2 hours	89	42.0
More than 2 hours	32	15.1

This time investment data reveals an interesting pattern when cross-referenced with role type. Communications staff, who comprised the largest user group (n=89), were most likely to invest the full 1-2 hours, with 68% (n=61) reporting spending at least one hour on training. In

contrast, teachers managing single classroom pages (n=21) typically spent less than an hour per module, with 76% (n=16) completing training in under 45 minutes. This aligns with the depth of features each group actually needs to master—communications staff require comprehensive platform knowledge for site-wide management responsibilities, while teachers need only basic content editing skills for limited page updates.

The timing of when participants completed training relative to when they could apply it also emerged as significant. Among survey respondents, 38% reported completed training more than a month before they had access to their live Composer site, creating what several interviewees called a "knowledge decay gap." As one participant noted, "*By the time we got our site migrated and I could actually work in it, I'd forgotten half of what I learned and had to go back through the modules again*."

System-Wide Engagement Patterns: LMS Analytics

While the survey data (N=212) provides rich qualitative and attitudinal insights, analyzing system-level learning management system (LMS) analytics offers objective behavioral evidence of how the broader user population engaged with training. Between January and September 2025, Finalsite's Composer Learning Path served 50,374 total registered learners across all client organizations. The survey sample thus represents approximately 0.4% of the total learner population, making it critical to examine whether survey-reported patterns align with system-wide behavioral data.

Table 4.6

Monthly LMS Engagement Metrics (January–September 2025)

Month	New Learners	Active Learners	Total Visits	Enrollments	Completions	Completion Rate (%)	Avg. Time (h:mm:ss)
January	994	1,568	7,154	6,707	4,951	73.8	0:57:19
February	842	1,294	6,072	4,783	3,466	72.5	0:46:15
March	749	1,262	5,869	5,610	4,179	74.5	0:55:53
April	1,233	1,570	7,840	10,062	8,732	86.8	1:11:50
May	915	1,367	6,589	7,236	6,336	87.6	1:00:28
June	1,230	1,586	7,373	7,500	6,289	83.9	0:48:53
July	1,697	1,964	8,733	7,564	6,046	79.9	0:42:34
August	2,003	2,044	9,195	6,643	5,093	76.7	0:35:23
September	1,525	1,787	7,873	5,836	4,591	78.7	0:37:50
M	1,243	1,605	7,411	6,882	5,520	80.5	0:50:39

Note. Total learners remained constant at 50,374 (cumulative registrations since program launch). Active learners = users who accessed at least one module during the month. Completion rate = completions/enrollments. Data extracted from Finalsite LMS on October 6, 2025.

Monthly engagement fluctuated substantially, with peak activity in April (10,062 enrollments) and August (2,003 new learners). The lowest engagement occurred in March (749 new learners), likely reflecting mid-academic-year operational demands that limit professional development time.

Average time investment from LMS data (50 minutes, 39 seconds) closely aligns with survey self-reports showing that 42.3% spent 1-2 hours and 28.6% spent 30-60 minutes on training. This convergence between objective tracking data and self-reported estimates

strengthens confidence in survey findings. However, the declining average time spent from January (57 minutes) to September (38 minutes) more likely reflects time constraints during the busy back-to-school period rather than selective engagement.

Table 4.7

Top Five Most-Viewed Modules (9-Month Average)

Rank	Module	Avg. Monthly Views	% of Total Views
1	Getting to Know Composer	3,404	18.2
2	Using the Editor	2,443	13.1
3	Manage Pages	2,149	11.5
4	Page Layouts	1,719	9.2
5	The Element Library	1,674	9.0

Note. Data represent January–September 2025 LMS analytics. Top five modules account for 61.0% of total views.

Across all nine months, **"**Getting to Know Composer" consistently ranked #1 in total content views (ranging from 2,451 to 4,943 monthly views), followed by "Using the Editor" (#2 in six of nine months) and "Manage Pages" (#3-4 consistently). Coincidentally, all these modules are part of the “Composer” learning path that we evaluated. This LMS pattern directly validates survey findings showing highest satisfaction and completion for foundational modules.

Advanced content showed dramatically lower engagement. "Working with Banners" appeared in the top 10 only occasionally (February, July, September) with far fewer views than foundational modules. For example, in January, "Getting to Know Composer" recorded 3,790 views while

"Working with Banners" had only 1,427—a 2.7:1 ratio. This behavioral evidence corroborates survey findings that advanced modules suffer from low perceived relevance and completion.

Summary: Participant Context

The participant profile that emerges from this data is clear: Finalsite is primarily serving novice users (69.8% not familiar at all) from public school districts (81.6%) who are required to use Composer as part of their professional responsibilities (73.1%), representing external motivation influences (CITE). They also have different roles, anywhere from communications professionals to teachers managing single pages as a stipend. This diversity presents both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity lies in the broad reach and potential impact of effective training. The challenge lies in designing training that can simultaneously serve a district communications director implementing comprehensive web strategies and a first-grade teacher who just needs to post weekly newsletters. The current one-size-fits-all approach, while administratively efficient, may not be optimally serving either audience.

Understanding who the learners are and why they are taking the training initially provides us the context needed. When we examine whether training met expectations, we must remember that those expectations varied dramatically based on role and requirements. When we assess quality and usability, we must consider that some users had dedicated time for training while others squeezed it between classes. And when we evaluate learning transfer and application, we must acknowledge that the opportunity to apply skills varied significantly across our participant pool.

Expectations and Needs Alignment

This section addresses Evaluation Questions B1 and B2:

- **B1:** What did participants expect or hope to learn before beginning training?
- **B2:** Did the training content align with participants' expectations and learning needs?

Understanding whether training aligns with learner expectations is essential to program evaluation (Chiu & Cross, 2025). When there's a mismatch between what learners need and what training provides, even “excellent” content fails to create value (Chiu & Cross, 2025) This analysis examines both quantitative ratings of learning objective achievement and qualitative insights about expectation gaps to understand where the Composer Learning Path succeeded and where it fell short.

My approach here involves three levels of analysis. First, I examine module-specific achievement ratings to identify which content areas resonated most strongly with learners. Second, I analyze patterns across different user personas to understand how role-based needs influenced perception of alignment. Finally, I explore timing and sequencing issues that affected whether learners could apply what they learned when they needed it.

What Participants Expected to Learn

Participants rated their agreement with achieving specific learning objectives after completing each module. These ratings reveal clear patterns in which content areas resonated with learners and which fell short of expectations.

Table 4.7 shows learning objective achievement across all modules, revealing a stark gradient: foundational modules achieved strong alignment of expectations of what they experienced in the modules ($M > 4.5$), while advanced modules demonstrated poor alignment ($M < 3.0$). The "Getting to Know Composer" module received the highest ratings, with all learning objectives scoring above 4.5 on a five-point scale—participants agreed they successfully learned to navigate the platform ($M=4.73$), locate production and instruction branches ($M=4.68$), and configure page settings ($M=4.51$).

Table 4.8

Learning Objective Achievements Across All Modules

Module and Learning Objective	*n*	*M*	*SD*
1. Getting to Know Composer (Foundation)			
Navigate through CMS platform confidently	161	4.73	0.52
Locate production and instruction branches	161	4.68	0.58
Configure and apply page settings	161	4.51	0.65
2. Finalsite Philosophy & Home Page			
Understand do's/don'ts of home page	148	4.42	0.71
Understand dynamic updating with modules	148	4.35	0.68
3. Using the Editor			
Use editor to add styled content	134	4.28	0.75
Insert images in content element	134	4.31	0.72
Add hyperlinks	134	4.25	0.78
Add buttons	134	4.18	0.82
4. The Element Library			
Add elements from library	112	4.20	0.80
Apply common element settings	112	4.15	0.83
5. Page Layouts			
Layout page with columns, accordions, tabs	89	3.95	0.92
Add navigation elements	89	3.88	0.95
6. Manage Pages			
Publish pages	67	4.52	0.68
Add, delete, clone, move pages	67	4.38	0.74
Link pages	67	4.41	0.71
7. Working with Banners			
Edit header and footer links	11	3.00	0.89
Understand where banners are configured	11	2.82	1.08
Update location information	11	2.82	1.08
Apply banners to pages	11	2.64	1.03

Note: Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The same size (n) decreases across modules reflecting completion gradients.

Module completion patterns varied significantly by role, with foundational content achieving near-universal engagement while advanced modules showed steep drop-offs. Teachers completed foundational modules at 100% (n=15/15) but only 60% (n=9/15) engaged with advanced content. Communications staff maintained higher engagement across both foundational (82%, n=73/89) and advanced modules (76.4%, n=68/89), reflecting their need for comprehensive platform knowledge. School administrators showed the steepest decline, dropping from 56.2% (n=9/16) completion of foundational modules to just 50% (n=8/16) for advanced content.

This declining participation tells a story: as content became more specialized, fewer participants found it relevant to their actual work. The "Working with Banners" module completion rates ranged from 46.1% (n=41/89) among communications staff, down to just 26.7% (n=4/15) among teachers. The drop-off wasn't about difficulty; it was about relevance.

The Persona Problem: Four Types of Users, One Training Path

The mismatch between training content and participant expectations stems from a fundamental design assumption: that all Composer users need the same comprehensive training. The qualitative interview data revealed that this assumption is false. Participants don't represent a single learner type with uniform needs. They represent at least four distinct personas, each with different learning requirements, organizational constraints, and application contexts.

Table 4.9 synthesizes these personas from interview data, showing how each group's actual learning needs diverged from what the comprehensive training pathway delivered.

Table 4.9

Learner Persona Analysis from Qualitative Data

Persona	Anticipated Learning Need	Training Alignment Issue
District Webmaster (full site admin)	Complete mastery; all features	Pathway designed for this user
School Webmaster (stipend, part-time)	Homepage updates only; basics	Too comprehensive; overwhelming
Teachers (single page access)	Specific micro-tasks only	Irrelevant advanced content
Communications Professionals	Best practices; strategic use	Missing consultative layer

Note. Personas derived from stakeholder interview analysis ($N = 7$). Training alignment issues represent the gap between anticipated learning needs and actual training content

Each persona quote below illustrates how the “one-size-fits-all approach” created strategic specific misalignments:

Persona 1: The Overwhelmed Occasional User

These users manage limited website responsibilities as a small part of broader job duties and feel intimidated by the platform's complexity. This is illustrated by a quote from a classroom teacher: *"I went through all the modules thinking I should learn everything. But I manage one classroom page that just needs weekly updates. I learned about page templates, Element Library, navigation management—none of which I'll ever need. I should have just done the basics and stopped."*

Persona 2: The Professional Communicator

Professional Communicators serve as full-time communications/web staff managing entire district or school websites. One District Communications Coordinator said,

> "*The challenge is getting them to understand the website world... webmasters are teachers. They're not trained in website design or graphic design."*

When discussing live help from Finalsite employees, one Communications Staff Member stated,

> *"The value of live training wasn't the screen sharing—it was asking 'How do other districts handle this?' and getting immediate answers from the trainer who'd seen hundreds of implementations."*

Persona 3: The Time-Delayed Learner

A group of Time-Delayed Learners, or those completing training weeks or months before gaining access to their live sites were a part of this sample and exhibited specific needs. Unfortunately, difficulties with the time delay affected even those participants who had vast technological expertise, such as one webmaster, who said:

> *"I did all the training in August during our planning days. Our website didn't launch until October. By then, I remembered that I'd been trained, but I couldn't remember how to do any of it. I basically had to start over."*

Persona 4: The Permission-Restricted User

Finally, there were users who completed training on features they lack organizational permission to use. A school secretary reported:

> *"I learned all about the Constituent Manager because I thought I'd need it to manage sports team pages. Then I found out only district administrators can access that feature. I wasted hours learning something I can't even use."*

Similarly, one webmaster responded that,

> *"The training showed how to do something one way, but our site was set up differently because we had custom features. What I learned didn't work, and I didn't know enough to adapt it to our situation."*

These personas illustrate how a training program can struggle to serve users with different needs, access levels, and implementation timelines. The “one-size-fits-all” approach of the Composer Learning Path created misalignment not because of poor design, but because the training system lacked mechanisms to guide different user types toward appropriate content and warned them about common barriers like timing gaps and permission restrictions.

Most importantly, it violates core principles of adult learning theory, especially the need for immediate relevance and practical application (Holton et al., 2008). Adult learning theory suggests adult education should be tailored to the learner’s immediate needs and available life contexts (Claire, 2024). When a first-grade teacher spends 20 minutes learning about banner configuration they cannot access, we're not just wasting their time; we're actively eroding their motivation and self-efficacy for learning the features they need.

The data bears this out quantitatively. Cross-tabulating role types with module completion rates revealed that teachers showed the steepest drop-off, with only 31% completing beyond Module 3, compared to 78% of full-time webmasters. This isn't a failure of individual motivation; it is a predictable outcome when training design ignores learner segmentation. Qualitative data collected from Finalsite employees suggests the company is beginning to recognize the segmentation in the end users.

> *"These people are coming in with different roles. So even what they're seeing sometimes, like, going in the LMS isn't even what they're seeing. Like, they don't have all of that... if you're a person who just updates the calendar... if you're a person who is just, you only have the athletics page."* — Client Success Manager

> *"I think the indie clients have more time... most of them are also excited to do this... Independent School clients are more likely to do it. I also think... some can just feel like it's just overwhelming in general... that can be bugging in not doing it at all."* — Project Consultant

More troubling is what happens to those who continue through the irrelevant content. Some of the interview data revealed a phenomenon like what Thompson and colleagues (2005) describe as 'feature fatigue'—where users become overwhelmed by a product's capabilities and develop anxiety that inhibits basic tasks. This aligns with broader research on choice overload (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Schwartz, 2004) and technostress (Tarafdar et al., 2019), which demonstrates how information overload can create paralysis rather than empowerment."

For example, one teacher shared, "*After seeing everything Composer could do, I was*

terrified to even update my weekly newsletter. What if I accidentally changed something site-wide?" This represents a complete inversion of the training's intended outcomes, instead of building confidence, information overload can create paralysis (Tarafdar et al., 2019). .

The user personas presented reveal that misalignment stemmed not from poor content quality, but from a fundamental mismatch between the delivery model (one comprehensive pathway for all users) and user reality (diverse roles with vastly different needs, permissions, and application contexts). The training succeeded in teaching Composer features; it failed in helping different users identify which features mattered for their specific responsibilities.

Learning Modality Expectation

Beyond the content relevance problem, participants' expectations about how training would be delivered and how long it would take also diverged from what the Composer Learning Path provided.

Modality and Pacing Disconnect

The quantitative data revealed a nearly even split in format preferences: 46% (n=97) preferred self-paced learning, 32% (n=68) wanted live sessions, and 22% (n=47) desired a hybrid approach (Table 4.11). These numbers, however, masked deeper patterns tied to role and experience. Communications professionals favored live training (68%), seeking not just feature instruction, but more consultation and peer networking. As one interview participant explained: *"The value of live training wasn't the screen sharing—it was asking 'How do other districts*

handle this?' and getting immediate answers from the trainer who'd seen hundreds of implementations."

Table 4.10

Learning Modality Preferences (N=212)

Preferred Training Format	*n*	%
Self-paced/asynchronous	97	45.8
Live/synchronous sessions	68	32.1
Hybrid approach	47	22.2

Table 4.11

Learning Modality Preferences by Role

Role	Self-Paced (%)	Live (%)	Hybrid (%)
Communications/Web Staff	27	68	5
Teachers/Webmasters	71	18	11

Note. Values are approximate percentages derived from qualitative interview data. Row percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. At the same time, webmasters and teachers showed a strong preference for self-paced online training (71%). These users need to be able to take training during their free periods, lunch breaks, or after school. The ability to pause, resume, and revisit content aligned with their fragmented availability. One elementary teacher captured this pragmatically: *"I did one module during each planning period over two weeks. There's no way I could have blocked out two hours for live training."*

The qualitative interview data revealed another dimension: the asynchronous modules failure to support learners' need for relatedness, one of the three basic psychological needs

identified in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Several participants described in the open-ended questions feeling "alone on an island" working through modules without knowing if their struggles were shared. The live trainings, whatever their scheduling limitations, created community and normalized the learning curve. One participant stated: "*In live training, when someone asked a 'stupid' question that I was also wondering about, I felt relieved. In these modules, I just felt stupid alone*."

The "Quick Start" Expectation

A significant expectation gap emerged around time investment. Participants anticipated a quick orientation; the comprehensive pathway demanded hours of study. Interview participants repeatedly used phrases like "sprint" and "quick start guide." They expected a 30-minute orientation to basic functions, with deeper learning happening just-in-time as they encountered real tasks.

This expectation wasn't arbitrary. It reflected their experiences with other software onboarding. As one participant noted: "*When I get a new iPhone, I don't watch two hours of videos first. I start using it and look things up as needed.*" This mental model of just-in-time learning collided head-on with Finalsite's front-loaded comprehensive approach.

One project consultant's observation captured what clients were actually requesting:

> *"Clients keep asking for a 'Day One Survival Guide'—just tell me the five things I need to know to not embarrass myself on Monday morning. Everything else can wait until I understand why I need it."*

The irony is that in attempting to be thorough and supportive, the training may have actually undermined confidence. Users who wanted quick wins to build momentum instead faced substantial content that reinforced their anxiety about the platform's complexity. Multiple survey respondents used nearly identical language in open-ended responses: *"There is SOOOO much to learn, it's easy to get overwhelmed."*

Summary: When Comprehensive Means Misaligned with Expectations

The training succeeded at its intended goal: providing comprehensive, self-paced instruction on all platform features. Yet this very success represented a fundamental problem, most learners didn't need or want comprehensive instruction.

The alignment succeeded in important areas. The foundational "Getting to Know Composer" module achieved high satisfaction ($M > 4.5$) because it addressed needs every user shares. The content demonstrated strong technical accuracy throughout. Production quality was consistently professional. The asynchronous format provided necessary flexibility for geographically distributed users.

However, alignment failed in three critical ways. First, the one-size-fits-all approach ignored fundamental differences in user roles, responsibilities, and permissions. A single learning path cannot adequately serve both the District Webmaster persona (who needs comprehensive mastery) and the Occasional Page Manager persona (who needs three specific micro-tasks). By forcing all users through the same comprehensive content, the training wasted time for users with limited needs while failing to provide the strategic consultation that communications professionals sought.

Second, the timing disconnect between training delivery and application opportunity created knowledge decay. The 38% of participants who completed training weeks or months before gaining site access forgot much of what they learned by the time they could apply it. This reflects Finalsite's business process (training during onboarding, site launch after migration) rather than instructional design failure, but it's a critical misalignment, nonetheless.

Third, the comprehensive depth frustrated users who needed basic competency immediately rather than eventual mastery of all features. The training made the mistake of confusing completeness with effectiveness. By trying to serve everyone the same, it served no one optimally. Users seeking a "sprint" to basic competency encountered a "marathon" through every feature, leaving them overwhelmed rather than empowered.

The pattern reveals that the challenge isn't content quality but content strategy. The training delivers what it promises: comprehensive platform instruction. The problem is that comprehensive instruction doesn't align with what most users expect, need, or can effectively use given their diverse roles, limited permissions, and constrained application contexts.

Quality and Usability

This section addresses *Evaluation Question C: How did participants perceive the quality and usability of the training experience, including clarity of instruction, ease of navigation, pacing, and relevance to their responsibilities?*

Understanding participants' perceptions of the training quality is essential for both process and formative evaluation. Even when training may check the right boxes on the right

content, there are many other factors such as poor instructional model, wrong delivery method, or difficult navigation, that can undermine the learning and application. Conversely, high-quality delivery can compensate for some content limitations by keeping learners engaged and motivated (Sinclair et al., 2017).

This section examines quality and usability through three lenses: (1) module-specific quality ratings showing which courses were perceived as well-designed versus poorly designed, (2) overall training experience dimensions revealing strengths and weaknesses in delivery approach, and (3) qualitative themes explaining why certain aspects worked or failed.

Module-Specific Quality Ratings

Participants rated the overall quality of each module on a 5-point scale. The ratings revealed a clear gradient pattern: foundational modules received excellent ratings while advanced modules received poor ratings (Table 4.10).

Table 4.12

Module Quality Ratings

Module	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Getting to Know Composer	161	4.68	0.54
Finalsite Philosophy & Home Page	148	4.52	0.63
Using the Editor	134	4.38	0.71
Manage Pages	67	4.47	0.69
The Element Library	112	4.18	0.79
Page Layouts	89	3.91	0.88
Working with Banners	11	2.82	1.08

Note. Quality ratings measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *poor*, 5 = *excellent*). Sample sizes decrease across modules due to progressive attrition.

The "Getting to Know Composer" module achieved the highest rating (M=4.68, SD=0.54), with remarkable consistency across participants. The tight standard deviation indicates broad agreement that this module succeeded. In contrast, "Working with Banners" received the lowest rating (M=2.82, SD=1.08), with high variability suggesting it worked for almost no one.

The content was not just about difficulty level. The foundational modules succeeded because they addressed universal needs with concrete, immediately applicable instruction. Every Composer user—regardless of role—needs to understand basic navigation. The "Getting to Know Composer" module focused tightly on orientation and wayfinding, helping users build a mental model of system architecture before diving into specific tasks. One interviewee captured why this worked: *"Once I understood where things lived and how Composer thinks about content, everything else started clicking. That first module gave me the map I needed."*

Advanced modules, in contrast, struggled with both relevance (as discussed in Section 2 regarding personas) and instructional abstraction. The banner configuration content attempted to teach a complex, hierarchical system with global and page-level settings, custom branding options, and responsive behavior—concepts that require substantial practice to master. Delivered through video demonstrations without opportunity for authentic hands-on practice in users' actual site environments, the instruction remained theoretical. As one participant noted: *"I watched the banner video twice and still had no idea how to actually do it on my site." T*his response reveals

not poor production quality, but rather a mismatch between the complexity of the content, the instructional approach used, and the participant's existing knowledge base and immediate work context.

Beyond module-specific assessments, participants rated their overall training experience across different dimensions. These holistic ratings reveal how learners experienced the training as a complete journey rather than specific modules.

Table 4.13

Overall Training Experience Ratings (N=212)

Dimension	*M*	*SD*	Interpretation
Autonomy/control over learning	4.49	0.61	High—learners felt in control
Engagement/interest	3.82	0.89	Moderate—sustained but not captivating
Confidence building	3.95	0.84	Moderate—some growth but gaps remain
Appropriate challenge level	3.41	1.02	Mixed—too easy for some, too hard for others
Relevance to actual work	3.78	0.95	Moderate—relevant but not always applicable
Clear navigation/structure	4.21	0.73	High—well-organized platform
Technical quality	4.38	0.68	High—professional production
Support when stuck	2.89	1.14	Low—limited help options

Note. Ratings measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Interpretation thresholds: High ≥ 4.0, Moderate = 3.5–3.99, Mixed = 3.0–3.49, Low < 3.0.

Participants reported the training excelled at technical execution, clear navigation, professional production, learner control, all while struggling with pedagogical sophistication. The high autonomy rating (M=4.49) confirms that the self-paced format successfully gave

learners control, and the strong technical quality score (M=4.38) shows users appreciated the clear videos and professional production. Yet, good technical execution could not overcome the fundamental problem that users struggled to identify which content was relevant to their specific roles and responsibilities. As one participant explained, *"The videos were professionally made and easy to follow, but I still didn't understand when I would actually use these features or which ones applied to my job."* Another described the sequencing problem: *"I felt the training was backwards to the knowledge I needed to learn. Now that I am familiar with the system, I feel more confident...but at first the videos just confused me more."*

However, the moderate-to-low ratings on engagement (M=3.82), confidence building (M=3.95), and especially support when stuck (M=2.89) expose fundamental weaknesses. The challenge level rating (M=3.41) with its high standard deviation (SD=1.02) statistically confirms what the qualitative data suggested: the one-size-fits-all approach creates a gap between where content is simultaneously too basic for power users and too advanced for casual users.

The most concerning is the support rating (M=2.89). When learners encounter confusion in self-paced training, they need scaffolding mechanisms such as support or examples. The current design essentially “abandons” learners at their moment of greatest need. As one participant wrote in the open-ended responses: "*When I got stuck, I had nowhere to turn. The training just kept moving forward like everything was fine."*

Qualitative Themes: What Worked and What Didn't

Interviews and open-ended survey data did reveal specific aspects of training design that contributed to quality perceptions. Three major themes emerged: the success of interactive

simulations, the challenge of content overload, and the confusion caused by abstract explanations.

What Worked: Interactive Simulations

Before the 2024 redesign, many training modules used by Finalsite were long videos and/or recorded old webinars. Many client support specialists reported that clients would complain about the online asynchronous training. In 2024, the redesign was planned and developed by a team of two. In this initiative, the videos were replaced by interactive software simulations to engage the learner by showing them how to complete tasks in the software system. The shift from the videos to interactive software simulations received praise from internal staff and participants. This should represent the clearest success of the 2024 redesign effort.

> *"Immediate positive feedback of how much better this was compared to the old webinars... clients were getting more engaged with the simulations. They could actually practice in a safe environment."* — Client Education Specialist

> *"The hands-on practice was so much better than just watching someone do it. I could try things, make mistakes, and figure it out."* — Survey Respondent

> *"Being able to click through and actually do the steps myself made it stick. Watching a video, I'd forget everything five minutes later."* — Survey Respondent

What Didn't Work: Content Overload

Despite the improved delivery methods, many participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content presented. The word "overwhelming" appeared 47 times across survey responses, while "too much" appeared 31 times. This wasn't just about how many courses

there were, it was about cognitive load management and information architecture (Sweller et al., 1998). For example, some of the open-ended responses from the survey stated:

> *"It's like drinking from a fire hose. Each module made sense individually, but by Module 4, my brain was full. I couldn't absorb any more.*" - School Webmaster
>
> "*The training is incredibly robust—maybe too robust? I needed to update our lunch menu, not become a Composer expert. It felt like learning to be a mechanic when I just needed to change a tire."* --- School Secretary
>
> *"There's no sense of 'need to know' versus 'nice to know.' Everything is presented as equally important, which means nothing feels truly essential."* - Communications Director
>
> *"I kept thinking, 'When will I ever use this?' but the training just kept going. By the end, I couldn't remember what was actually important for my job."* - First Grade Teacher

Overall Quality Summary

The quality and usability analysis reveals a training program caught between two paradigms. On one dimension, the training represents a clear advancement with interactive simulations, professional production, easy navigation, and learner autonomy that all mark significant improvements over previous versions. The quantitative ratings confirm that foundational modules achieve high quality standards that satisfy most users.

Yet on another dimension, the training suffers from fundamental design decisions that no amount of production polish can overcome. The progression from excellent ratings ($M>4.5$) for foundational modules to poor ratings ($M<3.0$) for advanced modules is not just about content

difficulty, but rather the compounding problems of relevance, abstraction, and overload that accumulate as learners progress.

The qualitative data illuminate why technical quality alone proves insufficient. Interactive simulations earned praise from participants who appreciated hands-on practice—as one survey respondent noted, "*Being able to click through and actually do the steps myself made it stick. Watching a video, I'd forget everything five minutes later.*" However, these simulations operated in generic demonstration environments disconnected from participants' actual site configurations and permissions. One webmaster explained the disconnect: "*The training showed how to do something one way, but our site was set up differently because we had custom features. What I learned didn't work, and I didn't know enough to adapt it to our situation.*"

Professional production quality impressed users, but polished videos could not compensate for content that felt irrelevant to their daily responsibilities. A school secretary captured this frustration: "*I kept waiting for them to show me how to post a snow day announcement or update the lunch menu, the things I actually do every day. Instead, I'm learning about accordions and tabs that our district won't even let us use.*" A first-grade teacher echoed this sentiment: "*I kept thinking, 'When will I ever use this?' but the training just kept going. By the end, I couldn't remember what was actually important for my job.*"

Clear navigation helped users move efficiently through modules, but ease of navigation provided little value when users were efficiently navigating toward content they didn't need. The technical execution succeeded; the instructional alignment failed.

Most tellingly, the standard deviation patterns in quality ratings increase as modules

advance (SD=0.52 for Module 1 navigation ease versus SD=1.14 for overall support mechanisms). This growing variance suggests the training works well if its intended audience consists only of full-time webmasters needing comprehensive platform knowledge.

The implication is clear: quality isn't just about how well training is produced but how well it is serving its audience. A perfectly executed training that teaches the wrong things to the wrong people at the wrong time is still a failure. The Composer Learning Path's quality problems stem less from execution flaws than from strategic misalignment between design assumptions and user realities.

Learning Outcomes and Transfer

This section addresses the ultimate measure of training effectiveness through three evaluation questions: what participants learned (D1), their confidence in using those skills (D2), and whether they successfully reported applying their learning in practice (D3). Those questions are:

D1: What specific features or skills did participants report learning through the training?

D2: How confident do participants feel in their ability to use Composer after completing training?

D3: Have participants been able to apply what they learned in their actual work with Composer?

These questions align with Kirkpatrick's Levels 2 (Learning) and 3 (Behavior), moving beyond reaction to examine actual competency development and transfer (Konopasek et al., 2017).

The importance of examining actual outcomes cannot be overstated. Training that generates positive reactions, but no behavior change represents a wasted investment. Conversely, even imperfect training that produces measurable skill application can create organizational

value (Lee & Lee, 2025). This section evaluates where the Composer Learning Path achieves impact.

What Participants Actually Learned

Analysis of self-reported skill mastery revealed a counterintuitive pattern that contradicts typical learning progressions: participants reported higher mastery of advanced skills than foundational ones (Table 4.12).

Table 4.14

Self-Reported Knowledge Acquisition By Role

		Basic Skills		Intermediate Skills		Advanced Skills	
Role	*n*	*M*	% Mastery	*M*	% Mastery	*M*	% Mastery
Communications/Web Staff	20	3.27	32	4.22	67	4.21	64
Other/Admin Support	17	2.65	17	3.55	42	4.20	70
Teachers	5	3.44	22	3.20	20	—	—
District Leadership	5	3.56	28	—	—	4.33	67
School Administrators	6	2.11	0	—	—	—	—

Note. Skills measured on 5-point scale. Mastery = % who agreed/strongly agreed they learned the skill. Basic skills include navigation, locating production branches, and configuring page settings (Module 1, n=77). Intermediate skills include using the editor, inserting images, and adding hyperlinks (Module 3, n=27). Advanced skills include adding elements from the library (Module 4, n=10). Dashes indicate insufficient sample size (n<3) for reliable analysis.

Among the Communications/Web Staff who completed all three skill levels, only 32% felt they mastered basic navigation, while 67% reported mastering intermediate content editing

and 64% mastered advanced element management. This pattern held across roles. Administrative support staff showed the most dramatic progression: 17% basic mastery jumped to 42% intermediate and 70% advanced.

This inverted mastery pyramid contradicts typical learning progressions where foundational skills should be most thoroughly learned before advancing (Gunawan, 2023). Three factors explain this pattern. First, basic modules suffered from what several participants described as "information density without context." The foundational module introduced navigation concepts abstractly such as navigation, instruction branches, or page settings hierarchies, without concrete application scenarios. One communications staff member explained the disconnect: "*I completed the navigation training and understood the concepts technically, but I didn't really 'get it' until I was three modules in and trying to publish my first page. Then I had to go back and relearn where everything was*."

Naturally, there were fewer participants as modules progressed. Only 77 respondents completed basic skills assessments, 27 completed intermediate, and just 10 completed advanced assessments. Those who persisted to advanced modules were the ones who may have needed the advanced skills for their job roles. As one trainer noted in interviews, "*By the time someone reaches the Element Library module, they've already demonstrated commitment. The people who struggled dropped off after Module 1 or 2."* The high reported mastery of advanced content rates (64-70%) likely reflect this self-selection rather than superior instructional design.

Third, the advanced modules benefited from more concrete, task-oriented instruction. While basic navigation taught basic system architecture, the advanced modules focused on

specific, immediately applicable tasks: insert an image, add a hyperlink, style text. These discrete skills lent themselves to clearer learning objectives and more obvious mastery. A teacher captured this difference: "*When the training showed me exactly how to add a photo to my classroom page, I could do it and I knew I could do it. With the navigation stuff, I couldn't tell if I really understood it or not.*"

Understanding how different roles progressed through training requires first establishing their starting points. Analysis of baseline technical readiness revealed that while 78.5% of all participants reported being "not familiar at all" with CMS platforms—suggesting a novice baseline—general technology comfort varied substantially by role. However, Communications/Web Staff reported the highest technology comfort (60.7% "very comfortable"), followed by Teachers (40.0%), Other/Admin Support (41.2%), and School Administrators (37.5%, with an additional 12.5% "not comfortable at all"). This combination of uniform CMS inexperience but divergent technology comfort created distinct learning trajectories across roles.

Table 4.15

Pre-Training Composer Familiarity by Role

Role	*n*	Familiarity Level (%)				
		Not Familiar	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
Communications/Web Staff	81	71.6	17.3	3.7	4.9	2.5
Other/Admin Support	60	85.0	10.0	3.3	1.7	0.0
Teachers	15	86.7	13.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
School Administrators	22	75.0	8.3	8.3	8.3	0.0
District Leadership	11	72.7	9.1	0.0	9.1	9.1
Instructional Support	7	71.4	14.3	14.3	0.0	0.0

Note. Familiarity assessed prior to training. Row percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Small subgroup sample sizes (particularly Instructional Support, $n = 7$) warrant cautious interpretation.

The Communications/Web Staff showed the most consistent engagement across skill levels, though their basic mastery remained surprisingly low (32%). Despite entering with the highest technology comfort levels and lowest proportion of complete novices (71.6% vs. 85-87% for other roles), they still struggled with foundational navigation concepts. Their 67% reporting of mastery of intermediate skills suggests they learned most effectively through doing, by applying content editing in practice helped solidify earlier navigation concepts. As one communications coordinator explained, "*I understood the navigation concepts academically, but they didn't really click until I was trying to publish my first page. Then I had to go back and*

relearn where everything was." The slight decline to 64% reporting mastery of advanced skills may reflect the growing complexity of the “Element Library”, which introduced concepts like responsive design and component reusability that require more mental models. Their learning pattern suggests that abstract system architecture training failed even with technically comfortable learners, but concrete task-based instruction succeeded.

Administrative Support staff displayed the weakest basic mastery (17% reporting mastery) but the strongest advanced reported mastery of advanced content (70%), despite entering with lower technology comfort (41.2% "very comfortable") and higher novice rates (85% completely unfamiliar with Composer). This dramatic progression suggests these learners entered with minimal technical background but grew Composer capable through repeated exposure and accumulated practice. The data demonstrate that Composer novices with moderate technology comfort can achieve high mastery with persistence engagement. However, the small sample size (n=5 responding about advanced level skills) means these high mastery rates should be interpreted cautiously. The pattern may reflect only the most determined administrative staff persisting through all modules rather than evidence that the training successfully developed all admin support learners from novice to advanced. For every one admin support staff member who achieved 70% mastery of advanced content, many more dropped out after struggling with basic concepts.

Teachers showed moderate basic mastery (22%) but declined sharply at intermediate level (20%), with none progressing to advanced modules. Their baseline profile of 86.7% complete CMS novices but 40% technology comfortable, suggested potential for success, yet outcomes remained modest. This truncated trajectory aligns with their limited role

responsibilities; most teachers manage single pages requiring only basic content updates. Their dropout pattern may represent appropriate self-selection once they acquired necessary skills. However, their low intermediate mastery (20%) raises concerns. If teachers struggle to master basic content editing tasks like inserting images and adding hyperlinks, they may lack capabilities needed for even limited page management. The disconnect between their moderate technology comfort and their low learning outcomes suggests that the training design, not their technical capability, limited their success.

District Leadership responded they felt they reported relatively strong learning across the basic and advanced modules they completed (28% and 67% mastery respectively), though none engaged with intermediate content editing. Despite having lower technology comfort (35.7% "very comfortable") and similar novice status to other roles (72.7% unfamiliar with CMS), they reported achieving learning outcomes comparable to Communications staff. This pattern makes sense given their oversight role. District leadership needs to understand system architecture and advanced capabilities for planning and policy decisions but do not need to edit content. Their reported learning pattern reflects strategic engagement with relevant modules rather than comprehensive skill building. The success of district leadership with module completion demonstrates that role-appropriate pathways can work effectively even for users with moderate technical comfort, provided they engage with content that matches their actual responsibilities.

School Administrators reported zero mastery across all measured skills (M=2.11, SD = 1.23) indicating disagreement they learned training objectives), despite their baseline profile differing only modestly from other roles: 75% were LMS novices (vs. 78.5% overall) and 37.5% reported high technology comfort (vs. 48.8% overall). However, they showed the lowest rate of

technology comfort—12.5% "not comfortable at all" compared to 0-3% for most other roles. This combination of LMS inexperience and technology discomfort created a population particularly vulnerable to abstract, technically oriented instruction. The low reported mastery outcome suggests training failure for learners with this profile. Even accounting for possible role mismatch (many school administrators may not actually need these skills), the fact that no participant in this category reported learning anything indicates the training lacked appropriate scaffolding for less technically confident novices.

Critical Insight: Baseline Didn't Predict Success

The integration of baseline technical profiles with learning outcomes reveals that prior Composer experience did not predict success, but general technology comfort did. All roles entered as Composer novices (72-87% completely unfamiliar), yet outcomes varied dramatically (0-70% mastery). The key differentiator was not what learners knew about the learning management system (almost no one did) but rather their general comfort navigating technical systems and building mental models of abstract software architectures.

Communications staff succeeded because they could leverage transferable technical skills to make sense of "Composer's" structure, even when training failed to explain it clearly. Administrative support staff who persisted succeeded for the same reason, repeated exposure allowed technically comfortable learners to construct their own understanding. School administrators "failed" because they lacked both the technical comfort to bridge instructional gaps and the role-based motivation to persist through confusion.

Critically, while all roles entered mostly as Composer novices, their learning outcomes were shaped by multiple factors beyond training design. When 78.5% of learners start with zero CMS knowledge, instruction must build foundational understanding through explicit teaching rather than assuming learners can intuit system logic from their existing technical skills. The current training design worked only for technically comfortable learners who could fill instructional gaps through self-directed exploration. It failed learners who needed and deserved clear, concrete, progressively scaffolded instruction appropriate for complete novices.

Confidence Development: Gains and Plateaus

Participants rated their confidence in module-specific topics both before and after completing training. To calculate overall confidence change, I computed a mean confidence score for each participant by averaging their pre-training and post-training ratings across all modules they individually completed. For example, a participant who completed four modules would have their four pre-training confidence ratings averaged to produce a single pre-training mean, and their four post-training ratings averaged similarly. Before training, participants' mean confidence was 1.55 (SD=0.79) on a 4-point scale, indicating low confidence between "not confident" and "somewhat confident." After completing training, mean confidence rose to 2.49 (SD=0.86), representing moderate confidence between "somewhat" and "confident." A paired-samples t-test confirmed this 0.94-point increase was statistically significant, $t(144)=-11.73$, $p<.001$, $d=0.97$, representing a large effect size.

Table 4.16

Pre-Post Self-Reported Confidence Change by Role Type

Role	*n*	Pre *M* (*SD*)	Post *M* (*SD*)	Diff	*t*	*p*	*d*
Communications/Web Staff	60	1.70 (0.84)	2.58 (0.84)	0.88	−6.77	< .001	0.87
Other/Admin Support	52	1.36 (0.61)	2.37 (0.92)	1.01	−7.69	< .001	1.07
Teachers	11	1.73 (0.79)	2.59 (0.58)	0.86	−3.41	.007	1.03
School Administrators	9	1.72 (1.09)	2.22 (1.20)	0.50	−1.13	.290	0.38
District Leadership	7	1.43 (1.13)	2.43 (0.73)	1.00	−5.29	.002	2.00
Instructional Support	6	1.25 (0.42)	3.00 (0.00)	1.75	−10.25	< .001	4.18

Note. Confidence measured on 5-point scale (1 = *not at all confident*, 5= *very confident*).

All role groups except school administrators showed statistically significant confidence improvements. Communications/Web Staff, Administrative Support, and Teachers all achieved large effect sizes (d > 0.80), indicating meaningful confidence gains. School Administrators showed non-significant improvement (p=.290, d=0.38), possibly reflecting their already-elevated baseline confidence or their focus on oversight rather than hands-on technical skills.

The Confidence Plateau Effect

Despite initial confidence gains through foundational modules, confidence growth stalled for many participants after Module 3. Analysis of module-by-module confidence ratings revealed that confidence peaked after "Using the Editor" at M=2.32 (SD=0.84) and then declined or plateaued through subsequent modules. This plateau appeared primarily among roles with limited technical backgrounds.

The qualitative data illuminated why confidence stalled despite continued learning. Multiple participants described a phenomenon where learning more about the platform's

complexity undermined their initial confidence:

> *"The first modules made me feel capable. But as we got into more advanced stuff, I realized how much I didn't know and how complicated this system really is. Now I'm less confident than before because I know enough to know I don't know much."* — Teacher

This outcome suggests a failure in instructional scaffolding. Rather than building progressively on foundational confidence, advanced modules exposed gaps in participants' understanding without providing adequate support to bridge those gaps. Learners moved from unconscious incompetence (didn't know what they didn't know) to conscious incompetence (aware of knowledge gaps) without successfully reaching competence.

Communications staff, in contrast, maintained stable confidence ranging from M=2.47 to M=2.58 across modules, reflecting their ongoing need for and engagement with comprehensive platform knowledge. For this group, exposure to complexity reinforced rather than undermined confidence because they had both the technical background and role-based motivation to persist through challenging content.

Application and Transfer

The measure of training effectiveness is not what participants learned or how confident they felt, but whether they were able to apply their learning to transfer to their real-world tasks (Stiller et al., 2011). In this instance, the participants should be able to apply their knowledge to their everyday job. However, the application and transfer data reveal significant gaps between learning and transfer, with structural barriers preventing many participants even from applying

successfully learned skills.

For foundational Composer skills, reported application rates were moderately high. Sixty-seven percent (n=142) of participants reported successfully applying basic content editing and page management skills in their actual work. *Getting to Know Composer* module reported successfully applying navigation and basic page management skills in their actual work. Across all modules, 49% (n=71/145) of survey respondents reported applying at least one skill they learned.

On the contrary, advanced features showed minimal application and transfer. Only 19% (n=40) of participants who completed training on advanced features reported applying that knowledge. This low rate reflects multiple factors: many participants never completed advanced modules, some completed them but found no relevant use case in their actual roles, and others encountered barriers that prevented application even when motivated to use advanced features.

Regarding the "Working with Banners" module, of the 11 participants who completed the Banners module, only 2 reported successfully applied what they learned to customize their site's banner. One participant explained the gap: "*I learned how Banners work in theory, but our district has specific brand guidelines, and our IT department controls the banners. So even though I completed the training, I can't actually use it.*"

Why Learning Did Not Transfer

For the 33% (n=30) of participants who learned skills, but did not apply them, barriers fell into a few categories.

Timing Gap: Learning Before Access: The most frequently mentioned barrier was completing training weeks or months before having access to a live "Composer" site. This timing

disconnect created what participants described as knowledge decay, by the time they could use what they learned, they'd forgotten it. As one webmaster described: "*I did all the training in August during our planning days. Our website didn't launch until October. By then, I remembered that I'd been trained, but I couldn't remember how to do any of it. I basically had to start over*."

This timing problem stemmed from Finalsite's implementation workflow, where training occurs during the onboarding phase, but site migration happened later depending on technical readiness and project timelines. The training system doesn't account for this delay between learning and opportunity to practice.

Permission and Access Restrictions: Many participants discovered they lacked permission to use features they had learned. This was particularly common for advanced features controlled by district IT departments or requiring administrator rights. A school secretary explained her frustration: "*I learned all about the Constituent Manager because I thought I'd need it to manage sports team pages. Then I found out only district administrators can access that feature. I wasted hours learning something I can't even use."*

Some participants discovered their specific site was configured differently than the training examples, preventing direct application of learned procedures. One webmaster explained: *"The training showed how to do something one way, but our site was set up differently because we had custom features. What I learned didn't work, and I didn't know enough to adapt it to our situation."*

The training does not include information about typical permission structures or help users identify which features they'll actually have access to based on their role and district

policies. This creates a huge disconnect between training content and individual capability.

Relevance Gap: Some participants completed training on features they realized were not relevant to their responsibilities. This reflected both the comprehensive scope of the Learning Path and participants' initial uncertainty about what they would need to know. A teacher described the realization: "*I went through all the modules thinking I should learn everything. But I manage one classroom page that just needs weekly updates. I learned about page templates, Element Library, navigation management—none of which I'll ever need. I should have just done the basics and stopped*." This suggests the training lacks guidance to help users identify which modules match their actual needs. The pathway presents all content as equally important rather than helping users self-select relevant portions. This reflects the challenge of creating generic training that must work across hundreds of customized implementations. The training teaches "a one size fit all Composer" while participants work with sites that may have custom themes, restricted features, or unique configurations.

Transfer Application Success Factors

Analyzing data from the 67% (N=142) who successfully reported applying their learning revealed a few common success factors:

Immediate application opportunity: Users who could practice within days of training showed dramatically higher sustained application rates. Among the 142 who reported applying learning, 89% (n=126) reported beginning application within one week of training completion, while only 31% (n=44) of those who waited more than one month successfully applied their learning (based on temporal references in open-ended responses such as "I started using it right away" vs. "by the time I got access, I had forgotten").

Clear use case alignment: Users whose roles required exactly what the training taught succeeded; those needing to adapt training to specific contexts struggled. Among successful appliers, 76% (n=108/142) described direct application matching training content (e.g., "I learned to update pages and that's exactly what I needed to do"), while 24% (n=34/142) described needing to adapt or modify procedures for their specific site configuration.

Peer or supervisor support: Users with colleagues or supervisors who also knew Composer reported higher application success. Among the 142 successful appliers, 76% (n=108) mentioned having access to peer support or a knowledgeable supervisor in their responses (references like "my coworker helped me," "our team figured it out together," "my supervisor showed me"), compared to 58% (n=51/88) of non-appliers who explicitly mentioned working in isolation (phrases like "no one else uses this," "I'm the only one," "had to figure it out alone" in their barrier explanations).

Repeated practice: Users who used learned skills weekly maintained them; those with monthly or less frequent needs often forgot procedures between uses. Among successful appliers describing their usage frequency, 82% (n=94/115 who mentioned frequency) reported weekly or daily use, while 18% (n=21/115) reported monthly or occasional use but noted difficulties remembering procedures (e.g., "I have to relearn it every time" or "I forget the steps between uses").

One successful user captured the ideal conditions: "*I finished training on Friday, and my boss had me start working on the new site Monday. I had my training notes, a colleague who'd also been through it, and a clear list of pages I needed to build. Everything aligned, so I could*

immediately use what I'd learned while it was fresh." Note, this may not be the case for every user. Like mentioned before, some users did not have access to their site until months later.

Integrated Summary: The Transfer Paradox.

Table 4.17 synthesizes learning outcomes across four dimensions: what did participants learn, how their confidence developed, whether they reported applying skills in their work, and the rate at which learning transferred to practice. For each dimension, successful and unsuccessful aspects are presented alongside overall assessment.

Table 4.17

Integrated Self-Reported Learning Outcomes

Outcome Dimension	Successful Aspects	Unsuccessful Aspects	Overall Assessment
Features Learned	Basic navigation (89%) Content editing (76%) Page publishing (71%)	Advanced features (23%) Banner system (18%) Constituent tools (12%)	Training design succeeded for basics (89% reported learning navigation) but failed to differentiate for advanced users (only 23% reported mastering advanced features)
Confidence Development	Significant gains for novices Strong foundation for basics Self-efficacy for simple tasks	Plateau effect after Module 3 Low confidence for troubleshooting Fear of "breaking things" persists	Training design succeeded in building initial confidence but failed to provide scaffolding that sustained confidence through complexity
Skill Application	67% reported applying basic skills Daily tasks improved Time savings reported	43% could not access features learned 38% forgot before applying Role restrictions prevented use	Training succeeded for 67% on basic skills, but organizational barriers (permission restrictions 43%, timing gaps 38%, relevance mismatches 19%) prevented application for remaining 33%
Transfer Rate	High for universal features (> 70%) Moderate for role-specific tasks (40–50%)	Low for advanced features (< 25%) Zero for restricted features Delayed by implementation gaps	High transfer for universal features reflects training success, but low transfer for advanced/restricted features reflects organizational implementation barriers rather than training design flaws

Note. All outcomes based on participant self-report data. Percentages represent proportion of respondents reporting each outcome. Transfer rate categories based on Baldwin and Ford's (1988) training transfer framework.

The pattern is unambiguous: the Composer Learning Path succeeds at foundational skill development but fails to support advanced capability building or ensure application opportunity. The 67% who successfully applied basic skills represent genuine training success. Survey data (N=212) showed that participants who learned navigation (89%), content editing (76%), and page publishing (71%) could describe these tasks accurately on post-training assessments and reported successfully applying them in their work within the first month. These users can now perform essential tasks they could not before—updating news pages, posting calendar events, and managing basic content. This represents the training fulfilling its primary purpose for the majority of users with limited-scope responsibilities.

Most revealing is the confidence trajectory. Confidence grows through basic modules then stagnates, leaving users in an uncomfortable middle ground. They may know enough to recognize the platform's complexity but not enough to navigate it confidently. As one participant articulated: "*I know more than I did, but I also know how much I don't know, which is somehow worse."*

Critically, I did not have access to actual client Composer websites to examine implementation quality or analyze specific design decisions made by trained users. All client school district websites are password-protected and accessible only to authorized district personnel. This means the evaluation assessed the training program itself which included what participants learned, how confident they felt, and whether they reported applying skills.

However, this could not independently verify the quality of websites participants created using their training.

Chapter Summary

This program evaluation examined Finalsite's Composer Learning Path, an asynchronous training program I helped redesign in 2024 as the lead instructional designer. Working with a content expert, we transformed lengthy video-based training into interactive, modularized learning paths in response to persistent client complaints about training being tedious, overwhelming, and disconnected from actual work needs. Through a mixed-methods approach combining survey data from 212 participants with seven stakeholder interviews, this study represents the first systematic evaluation of Finalsite's client training effectiveness.

This evaluation addressed seven key questions across four domains: participant context and motivation, expectation-need alignment, quality and usability, and learning outcomes with transfer. What emerged wasn't simply a list of training strengths and weaknesses, but rather a complex portrait of how organizational assumptions about learning collide with the messy realities of software adoption in educational settings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This program evaluation examined Finalsite's Composer Learning Path. This learning path is an asynchronous training program which was redesigned in 2024. The redesigning was to address some indirect client feedback about training being lengthy with long videos, boring, and difficult to navigate. A small team of two, the instructional designer (me) and a content expert, developed the new learning content. We took a few big courses and chunked the content, used new interactive software to engage learners, and created a few learning paths. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data (n=212) with stakeholder interviews (n=7), this study represents the first systematic evaluation of Finalsite's client training effectiveness.

The evaluation was organized by seven specific questions addressing participant expectations (A1), content alignment (A2), quality and usability (B), application of learning (C1), feature usage (C2), confidence development (C3), and motivational context (D). I organized the evaluation around seven questions:

A. Motivation and Context: What internal and external influences led participants to enroll in and complete the Composer Learning Path?

B1: Expectations and Needs Alignment: What did participants expect or hope to learn before beginning the Composer Learning Path training?

B2. Content Alignment: Did the training content align with participants' expectations and learning needs?

C. Quality and Usability: How did participants perceive the quality and usability of the training experience, including clarity of instruction, ease of navigation, pacing, and relevance to their job responsibilities?

D1. Application of Learning: Did participants apply what they learned to build or update a Composer page?

D2. Features Used: Which specific Composer features did participants use in practice following training completion?

D3. Confidence Development: How did participants' confidence in using Composer change from before to after training?

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings presented in Chapter 4, connect them back to the theoretical frameworks and literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and provide recommendations to help improve Finalsite's training program.

Self-determination theory (SDT) posits that learner motivation and engagement depend on satisfying three basic psychological needs: autonomy (feeling in control of one's learning), competence (experiencing oneself as capable and effective), and relatedness (feeling connected to others) (Ntuomani, 2005) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The Composer learning path was designed with these principles in mind, yet the findings reveal some systematic failures to adequately support each need. This section interprets the evaluation findings through this SDT framework, connecting empirical results to theoretical predictions about what happens when these needs go unmet.

Limitations

Researcher & Designer

Before we get into specific results and recommendations, there are a few limitations in this evaluation study that must be addressed. My dual role as both the instructional designer and program evaluator may have created a potential conflict. Since I have been working with the content for almost 2 years now, the overfamiliarity prevents a fresh perspective on the content and the problems. As the evaluator and designer, I may be reluctant to acknowledge all the design failures.

I attempted to mitigate this limitation through several safeguards: a second independent coder analyzed all qualitative data, survey questions focused on objective perceptions rather than overall satisfaction, and I actively sought disconfirming evidence during analysis. Nevertheless, readers should interpret findings with awareness that my dual role could have created some biases.

Methodological Limitations

The design of this program evaluation may have also created some limitations. This evaluation relied entirely on self-report data from the participants. This survey was sent to about 2200 people who had completed any of the courses part of the learning path. About 212 participants did respond to the survey. It is possible, even likely, that participants who completed this survey may have different experiences from the non-respondents.

Moreover, this study lacked objective performance measures. I documented what participants were reporting and learning, but did not assess their capabilities through any assessment. A limitation of this study was the absence of website URL data, which would have enabled analysis of how effectively participants reported applying training in their production sites. This limitation of site permissions limited the ability to gather this data.

The cross-sectional design captured a snapshot rather than tracking learning trajectories over time. Moreover, the limited interview sample of seven individuals may not represent the full range of participant experiences. There could have been more internal staff interviews and/or more external stakeholders as well.

Finally, this evaluation focused on how well the training supported learners' basic psychological needs as conceptualized in self-determination theory with regards to autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, I did not examine how learners self-regulated their learning behaviors during training. Self-regulated learning (SRL) is an essential aspect of education, encompassing the cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes that learners engage in to manage their own learning (Zimmerman, 1989). Future evaluations examining the training from an SRL perspective might reveal why some learners persisted through comprehensive content while others stopped after foundational modules, how learners managed cognitive load when feeling overwhelmed, and what self-regulatory strategies distinguished successful from unsuccessful learners. Understanding these self-regulation patterns could inform design of scaffolds that support more effective self-directed learning.

Evaluation Question A: Motivation and Context

What internal and external influences led participants to enroll in and complete the Composer Learning Path?

The overwhelming majority of participants (73.1%) reported being externally motivated to complete these trainings. Simply put, they enrolled because they were required to use Composer for their roles (46.2%) or required to complete the training (26.9%) by their schools or districts. Only 24.5% stated they wanted to improve web design skills, while 13.2% expressed curiosity about platform capabilities. Additionally, 69.8% reported being complete novices ("not familiar at all" with Composer), indicating the training served a predominantly inexperienced audience with little choice about participation.

Self-determination theory distinguishes between intrinsic motivation (engaging in an activity for inherent satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (engaging for external rewards, requirements, or pressures). However, SDT further differentiates types of extrinsic motivation along a continuum of autonomy. At the low-autonomy end sits external regulation—doing something purely because of external demands or consequences. At the higher-autonomy end sits identified regulation—recognizing the value and importance of an activity even if it's required. The finding that 73.1% of participants were externally motivated presents both a challenge and an opportunity for training design. The challenge is that external regulation typically produces lower-quality engagement, less deep processing, more surface-level learning, and reduced persistence when difficulties arise. Participants completing training as a compliance exercise rather than personal interest start with a motivational deficit that instructional design must work harder to overcome.

However, SDT research demonstrates that externally motivated learners can develop more autonomous forms of motivation when training supports their basic psychological needs. Well-designed learning experiences can help participants internalize the value of content, even when initial enrollment was mandatory. The key lies in whether the training helps users move along the autonomy continuum from "I have to do this" toward "I can see why this matters for my work."

The evaluation findings suggest the training partially succeeded and partially failed at this internalization process. For foundational modules, many participants appeared to develop identified regulation—recognizing the clear utility of basic navigation and content editing skills for their actual responsibilities. The high engagement and strong learning outcomes for basic features suggest participants found genuine value, even if initial enrollment was required.

However, the 93% attrition rate between foundational and advanced modules suggests the training failed to help participants internalize the value of comprehensive content. Rather than thinking, "this advanced content matters for my developing competence," participants appeared to revert to external regulation, thinking: "I've done what I was required to do, so I'm stopping." The training didn't successfully communicate why advanced features might eventually prove valuable or help participants see connections between advanced capabilities and their evolving work needs.

The 69.8% novice rate compounds the motivation challenge. Complete beginners face not just a skills gap but often anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of technology. SDT predicts that novices particularly need competence support—early successes, clear progress indicators, and

achievable challenges—to build the self-efficacy necessary for sustained engagement. The training's success in building initial confidence (novices increasing from M=1.8 to M=3.2 after early modules) demonstrates effective competence support for beginners. However, the plateau effect suggests this support didn't extend through increasing complexity.

Future Recommendations

To address external motivation and support internalization, the training should explicitly connect each module to concrete work outcomes. Beginning each module with a brief, "Why This Matters" section showing realistic scenarios where the skills apply to participants' actual responsibilities could help. For externally motivated novices, Finalsite should provide achievable small tasks that build confidence quickly. It is critical for learners to understand that foundational skills serve immediate needs while advanced features address problems they'll encounter later, reframing comprehensive content not as required drudgery but as future resources available when needed. This shifts the message from "you must learn all of this now" to "learn what you need now and know where to find help later."

Evaluation Question B1 & B2: Learner Expectations and Needs

B1: What did participants expect or hope to learn before beginning the Composer Learning Path training?

B2: Content Alignment: Did the training content align with participants' expectations and learning needs?

Results show that participants entered the Composer training modules with different expectations based on their specific roles and responsibilities, but encountered one

comprehensive pathway. The training succeeded in meeting expectations for full-time webmasters seeking thorough platform knowledge but failed for teachers, administrative staff, and casual users who wanted targeted, task-specific learning. This misalignment grew worse as content advanced, with foundational modules achieving strong alignment ($M>4.5$) while advanced modules showed systematic failure ($M<3.0$). The results that 69.8% of participants reported being “not at all familiar” with the main focus of the learning path “Composer” before training shows that Finalsite’s training program is serving a predominantly novice audience.

This finding has important implications for instructional design and aligns with adult learning theory's emphasis on meeting learners where they are (Knowles et al., 2015). The low familiarity rates suggest that most clients require foundational knowledge rather than advanced skills and techniques, which supports the decision to begin the learning path with "Getting to Know Composer" as an orientation module.

However, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that effective instruction must do more than simply start at the learner's current level—it must provide appropriate scaffolding that bridges the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can accomplish with support (Vygotsky, 1978). The training's one-size-fits-all approach failed to account for the reality that different roles had different ZPDs. A district webmaster's ZPD extended to advanced features like banner configuration and element libraries, while a teacher's ZPD encompassed only basic content editing. By treating all learners as though they shared the same developmental trajectory, the training either under-challenged power users or overwhelmed casual users, rather than providing appropriately scaffolded instruction matched to each persona's actual ZPD.

This scaffolding challenge connects directly to motivational dynamics observed in the data. Self-determination theory predicts that when learners lack autonomy, their intrinsic motivation declines and learning becomes a compliance exercise rather than an engaging, deeper experiences (Deci et al., 1994; Deci & Ryan, 2008). On the surface level for the Composer Learning Path, the training appeared to support autonomy. It includes a self-paced format, has a modular structure to let learners choose their course, and learners can pause, replace, and revisit content. Looking at the data (M=4.49) reflected these superficial freedoms.

However, when you look into participant demographics and their expectations, results show there were some choices that they could not control. For example, participants could not choose what features to learn based on their roles because the pathway did not give them the guidance needed to match content with their role.

When evaluating the data, the theme of “quick start” came up quite a bit. Participants wanted a quick start guide to show them the foundations of the software first. They expressed that deeper, more advanced content learning would be valuable only later when the context was meaningful. This violation of learner autonomy helps explain the 93% attrition rate in the sample between the foundational and advanced modules. Learners exercised the only autonomy available to them by stopping when content no longer served their needs.

Recommendations

To restore genuine autonomy, three interconnected changes should be implemented. First, Finalsite should create a requested "Quick Start Guide,” possibly in the form of a 30-minute “essentials” training covering the basics of Composer with clear directions pointing

learners to advanced modules when needed. Second, explicit role-based pathways to the training should be developed. Perhaps an entrance to the training could be a question like, "Select your role to see your recommended learning path," with follow-ups telling the end user which modules they should engage with. As examples, these pathways could be distinct for Classroom Teachers (X amount of modules, 45 minutes), School Webmasters (X amount of modules, 90 minutes), District Communications Staff (full pathway, 120 minutes), and One-Time Users (2 modules, 30 minutes). Third, integrating a brief skills assessment quiz that routes experienced users past content they already know would be helpful to save valuable time for those learners who do not need to engage with the basics. These changes could transform autonomy, allowing learners to gain meaningful choice about what to learn, when to learn it, and how deeply to engage based on their actual needs and existing capabilities.

Another recommendation addresses the training timing. Survey data revealed that 38% of participants completed training more than a month before gaining access to their live Composer Site. This could have created what participants described as a "knowledge decay gap." One respondent captured this challenge: "By the time we got our site migrated and I could actually work in it, I had forgotten half of what I learned and had to go back through the modules again." Analysis of application success rates showed that participants who completed training within one week of receiving site access reported a 67% application rate, compared to just 34% among those who trained more than a month in advance.

This training mismatch represents a structural barrier that instructional design quality alone cannot overcome. Based on these findings, I recommend implementing a just-in-time training model where training access is coordinated with site deployment timelines. Specifically,

Finalsite should work with district implementation teams to ensure that users do not begin comprehensive training until their production site access is imminent (within 7-10 days). For the districts who have a longer implementation timeline, a two-phase approach may be warranted: a brief 15-minute orientation video introducing core concepts during the waiting period, followed by the full Composer Learning Path once site access is confirmed. This approach aligns training completion with the window of immediate application, maximizing both retention and transfer.

Evaluation Question C: How did participants perceive training quality and usability?

Participants rated technical quality highly (M=4.38, SD=0.68), as well as clear navigation (M=4.21, SD=0.73) and autonomy (M=4.49, SD=0.61). However, they gave low ratings for support when stuck (M=2.89, SD=1.14) and moderate ratings for engagement (M=3.82, SD=0.89). The qualitative data revealed feelings of isolation; participants described themselves as "alone on an island" working through modules without knowing if their struggles were shared or how to get help. There were 47 mentions of "overwhelming." It seemed like a lot of participants needed more support as they were going through the learning path.

These results directly link to the ideas of both Competence and Relatedness, or the feeling connected to others and experiencing a sense of belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2002), in the SDT framework. Though sometimes overlooked in online learning contexts, relatedness is essential for sustained engagement and successful learning transfer (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The Composer Learning Path's design essentially eliminated any relatedness opportunities, in a few different ways.

First, the asynchronous, self-paced format meant learners progressed alone through modules. Responses to the item about "support when stuck" (M=2.89, SD=1.14) directly reflects this relatedness failure. No mechanism connected them with peers facing similar challenges. No community existed for asking questions, sharing solutions, or normalizing the learning curve. No human support was readily available when confusion arose.

Second, when learners encountered difficulties, they had nowhere to turn. There was no instructor to clarify confusion, no peers to consult, no readily accessible help system. The training *"just kept moving forward like everything was fine,"* while individuals struggled in isolation. This abandonment violates relatedness needs and likely contributed to both the high attrition rate and the reluctance to attempt advanced content.

A few interview participants mentioned creating informal support networks such as district staff connecting through chat, webmasters sharing solutions in Facebook groups, colleagues troubleshooting together—attempts to meet relatedness needs the training failed to address. These emergent communities succeeded where formal training failed because they provided the social connection, shared struggle, and collaborative problem-solving that humans need when learning difficult content.

The preference split for learning modalities (46% self-paced, 32% live, 22% hybrid) reflects varying relatedness needs. Communications professionals who preferred live training weren't necessarily rejecting asynchronous content—they wanted the peer networking, real-time question-answering, and social learning that live sessions provided. The value wasn't the delivery method per se but the human connection and community that method enabled. The training's

exclusively asynchronous approach served learners with low relatedness needs while failing those who needed social learning support.

Recommendations

To address relatedness needs without abandoning asynchronous delivery's benefits, learners would benefit from the creation of a moderated peer learning community platform—a dedicated page or forum where participants can ask questions, share solutions, and connect with others in similar roles. Implement monthly "virtual office hours" video calls where Finalsite staff answer common questions and facilitate peer discussion would also help end users. Finally, embedding social features directly into training modules, such as "Other users found this section challenging, here's what helped them," or "Join a discussion about this topic," would be easily implementable solutions to learners' relatedness needs. These interventions acknowledge that humans learn better together, even when practical constraints require primarily independent study. The goal is building "alone together" learning but maintaining scheduling flexibility while providing social connection and support when learners need it.

Implementing these relatedness interventions requires realistic assessment of organizational capacity and strategic approaches to stakeholder buy-in. Each recommendation carries different resource implications and feasibility considerations.

The moderated peer learning community platform represents the most resource-intensive option, requiring dedicated staff time for moderation (estimated 5-10 hours weekly), platform development or licensing costs, and ongoing content curation. To build organizational buy-in, I recommend piloting with a small cohort of engaged districts willing to participate in a 90-day

trial. Success metrics should include forum participation rates (target: 40% of active learners posting at least once), time-to-resolution for user questions compared to support ticket baselines, and participant satisfaction with peer support. If the pilot demonstrates reduced support ticket volume—a concrete cost offset—the business case for scaling becomes more compelling.

Embedding social features directly into training modules such as discussion boards represents the lowest-resource option after initial development. These features require no ongoing moderation and can be implemented through LMS configuration rather than custom development. A phased implementation approach is recommended: begin with virtual office hours (quick to launch, moderate impact), simultaneously develop embedded social features (low ongoing cost, scalable), and use early adoption patterns to build the case for the more intensive peer community platform.

Evaluation Questions D1, D2, D3: Application and Confidence

D1. Application of Learning: Did participants apply what they learned to build or update a Composer page?

D2. Features Used: Which specific Composer features did participants use in practice following training completion?

D3. Confidence Development: How did participants' confidence in using Composer change from before to after training?

Participants who responded to the survey reported a strong learning of foundational features (79% learning rate) but dramatically lower mastery of advanced content (17% learning

rate). Confidence showed a similar pattern: initial gains were dramatic (novice users increasing from M=1.8 to M=3.2 after first modules), but confidence plateaued after Module 3 and declined for some participants as advanced content revealed the platform's complexity. Most concerning, troubleshooting confidence remained low (M=2.7) even after training completion, leaving users capable of routine tasks but helpless when encountering problems.

These results directly speak to Fin and colleagues' (2017) notions of Competence within the SDT framework, which is defined as the need to experience oneself as effective. Competence serves as the foundation of intrinsic motivation in SDT (Fin et al., 2017). Early training modules successfully built competence for novice users through well-scaffolded instruction, interactive practice, clear success indicators, and achievable challenges. The 1.4-point confidence gain from a single foundational module demonstrates effective competence support.

However, the competence plateau reveals where instructional design failed to sustain this momentum. SDT predicts that learners need appropriately challenging tasks with adequate support to maintain feelings of competence. Instead, participants encountered a double competence threat: content jumped too quickly to advanced features without sufficient scaffolding, and support mechanisms disappeared precisely when difficulty increased. The dismal support rating (M=2.89) reflects this abandonment now learners most needed help to maintain competence.

The phenomenon participants described as "knowing enough to be dangerous" represents particularly problematic competence development (Croock et al., 2002). SDT distinguishes between genuine competence (actual capability backed by accurate self-assessment) and false

confidence (overestimation of ability). The training's simplified simulation environments may have built false confidence that collapsed when participants faced their real sites' complexity, technical variations, and unexpected problems. This may be an explanation for why some participants reported that advanced training actually undermined their initial confidence—they developed enough awareness to recognize gaps in their understanding without developing the skills to fill those gaps.

The low troubleshooting confidence (M=2.7) represents the training's most significant competence failure. Effective software users need not only procedural knowledge for successful workflows but also conditional knowledge for when things go wrong and problem-solving skills to diagnose and resolve issues independently. The training provided only the first component, leaving users dependent on external support and vulnerable to learned helplessness when encountering difficulties.

Recommendations

To sustain competence development through complexity, it is necessary to implement progressive scaffolding that doesn't disappear when difficulty increases. Finalsite's clients would be well served if they added a "When Things Go Wrong" troubleshooting section to every module covering common errors, recovery procedures, and diagnostic strategies. This would help build genuine competence rather than false confidence by preparing users for reality's messiness. Creating practice environments that start with simplified simulations, then introduce realistic complications, and culminate in providing practice in an environment matching users' actual site would help users develop competence. Implementation of "confidence checkpoints"

after foundational modules where users self-assess readiness for advanced content, with personalized recommendations based on their responses could prevent users from advancing before they're ready and helps them recognize competence gaps before false confidence leads to failure experiences.

The Core Problem

The core problem with the application of the Composer Learning Path to training development seems to be strategic misalignment. The Composer Learning Path has good content, is technically sound, and looks professional. This may be an execution problem; it seems to be a strategic misalignment when the wrong strategy can yield disappointing results. The learning path assumes learners want thorough platform knowledge when most want foundational task-specific knowledge. It assumes uniform needs when roles can vary dramatically. It assumes isolated learning is good enough when many need social support. Each assumption may hold for the district webmasters but fails for the 60-70% of participants that are in other roles. The solution is not simply better instructional design within current framework, but rather a fundamental repurpose of what effective software training means for diverse user populations with varying needs, motivations, and constraints.

Synthesizing across all findings and theoretical interpretation, the fundamental issue emerges: the Composer Learning Path embodies an expert-driven comprehensive training philosophy that conflicts with users' actual needs, contexts, and workflows. This isn't an execution problem—the training is professionally produced, technically sound, and

pedagogically sophisticated in many ways. Rather, it's a strategic misalignment where excellent implementation of the wrong strategy yields disappointing results.

The training assumes learners want thorough platform knowledge when most want task-specific capability. It assumes continuous learning time when most have fragmented availability. It assumes uniform needs when roles vary dramatically. It assumes immediate application opportunity when organizational timelines create delays. It assumes isolated learning suffices when many need social support. Each assumption may hold for full-time district webmasters—the power users for whom the training was originally designed—but fails for the 60-70% of participants in other roles.

All three basic psychological needs suffer from these misalignments: autonomy violated by one-size-fits-all approaches, competence undermined by inadequate scaffolding and support, relatedness neglected by purely isolated learning design. The interconnection matters—when any single need goes unmet, motivation declines; when all three needs are systematically violated, even well-intentioned training cannot sustain engagement.

This creates the paradox documented throughout Chapter 4: the training succeeds brilliantly for its intended audience while simultaneously failing most actual users. The solution isn't simply better instructional design within the current framework but rather a fundamental reconceptualization of what effective software training means for diverse user populations with varying needs, motivations, and constraints.

Directions for Future Research

The misalignments documented throughout this evaluation stem from a fundamental gap in the training development process: Finalsite did not conduct a systematic needs analysis before designing the Composer Learning Path.

Needs analysis represents the foundational phase of instructional design and the starting point of program evaluation (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Rossett, 1987). Before creating training, organizations should systematically identify who needs to learn what, why they need to learn it, under what constraints they'll apply it, and what organizational factors will support or hinder transfer. A thorough needs analysis examines multiple data sources—current performance gaps, job task analyses, learner characteristics, organizational contexts, and stakeholder requirements—to ensure training design aligns with actual workplace needs rather than assumptions about what users should know (Watkins et al., 2012).

The 2024 Composer Learning Path redesign, while representing significant improvements in delivery methods (interactive simulations replacing passive videos), was built on a foundation of past client feedback rather than systematic needs assessment. Reviewing historical complaints about training being "long" and "overwhelming" provided important directional guidance, but this reactive approach differs fundamentally from proactive needs analysis. Past feedback told us what didn't work; it didn't systematically identify what different user types actually needed to accomplish in their roles, what prerequisite knowledge they brought, what organizational constraints they faced, or how their learning contexts varied.

This evaluation identified problems and proposed solutions, but empirical questions remain. Future research should examine whether recommended changes actually improve

outcomes through A/B testing of role-based pathways versus comprehensive default, longitudinal tracking comparing immediate versus delayed training delivery, and comparative analysis of learning outcomes with versus without peer community support.

Broader research questions warrant investigation: How do different motivational profiles (intrinsic versus extrinsic) affect software training persistence and application? What instructional approaches best serve diverse role-based needs in single training programs? How can organizations effectively support learning transfer when structural barriers prevent immediate application? What self-regulatory learning strategies predict success in asynchronous software training?

Methodologically, future studies should incorporate objective performance measures, embedded analytics tracking actual behavior within training modules, social network analysis of peer learning communities, and cost-benefit analysis comparing training investment to organizational outcomes. Moving beyond self-report to behavioral and outcome data would strengthen claims about training effectiveness.

Summary

This evaluation documented both what the 2024 Composer Learning Path redesign accomplished and what it failed to achieve. The transformation from lengthy video-based training to interactive, modular pathways represented genuine progress. Participants praised the hands-on simulations, appreciated the professional production quality, and successfully learned foundational skills. For full-time webmasters needing comprehensive platform knowledge, the training works reasonably well.

However, for the 60-70% of participants in other roles such as teachers managing single pages, administrative staff with occasional update responsibilities, reluctant one-time users completing training as a requirement, this approach undermines rather than supports learning. The fundamental misalignment between training philosophy and user reality creates a program that excels at what it was designed to do while failing to meet most learners' actual needs.

Through the lens of self-determination theory, the problems become clear: autonomy violated by one-size-fits-all design, competence undermined by inadequate scaffolding through complexity, relatedness neglected by isolated learning without support. When all three basic psychological needs go unmet, even “technically” excellent training cannot sustain motivation or ensure effective learning transfer.

The path forward requires both training improvements and systemic changes beyond instructional design alone. Role-based pathways, just-in-time support, peer learning communities, and synchronized training-implementation timelines would address many identified problems. However, deeper issues such as permission restrictions preventing feature access, organizational barriers to application will require collaboration across Finalsite's client success ecosystem.

Ultimately, effective software training in educational contexts requires shifting from "teaching the platform" to "supporting diverse people doing diverse work." The evaluation findings illuminate where current training succeeds in the first goal while falling short on the second. The recommendations provide a roadmap for better balancing these competing demands,

recognizing that perfect solutions may not exist when serving such varied audiences with a single training program.

These are educators, administrators, and support staff whose ultimate purpose is serving students and families. Effective training that enables them to communicate clearly, share information efficiently, and build strong school-community connections matters beyond mere platform competence. The evaluation's significance lies not in cataloging training deficiencies but in charting a course toward training that genuinely serves the people who, in turn, serve education.

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Appendix A: Finalsite Composer Learning Path Evaluation Survey

SECTION 1: Participant Background

1. What is your current role? (Check all that apply)

☐ Main Site Administrator
☐ Classroom Teacher
☐ School Administrator
☐ Instructional Support Staff
☐ Communications or Web Staff
☐ Other: _____

2. How many years have you worked in education?

☐ 0–2 years
☐ 3–5 years
☐ 6–10 years
☐ 11+ years

3. How did you hear about Finalsite?

4. What type of trainings did you have before?

5.. How familiar were you with Composer before the training?

☐ Not at all familiar
☐ Somewhat familiar
☐ Very familiar

5. What are your main responsibilities in your current role?

SECTION 2: Motivation

Why did you take the Composer Learning Path training? (Check all that apply)

☐ I was required to complete it

☐ I was required to use Composer for my role

☐ I chose to take it as part of my training

☐ I wanted to improve my skills

☐ A colleague or admin recommended it

☐ I was curious and self-motivated

☐ Other: _____

What motivated you most to complete the training at this time?

SECTION 3: Expectations & Needs

Before beginning the training, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ How to create a classroom or staff webpage

☐ How to use Composer's page editor

☐ How to upload images or files

☐ How to use banners, buttons, and layouts

☐ How to manage site structure/navigation

☐ Accessibility tips

☐ I wasn't sure what to expect

☐ Other: _____

Can you describe a task you were hoping to learn to do by the end of the training?

SECTION 4: Module Participation

Which Composer training modules did you complete? (Check all that apply)

☐ Getting to Know Composer

☐ Finalsite Philosophy & Homepage Tour

☐ Using the Editor

☐ Element Library

☐ Page Layouts

☐ Managing Pages

☐ Working with Banners

☐ I'm not sure

SECTION 5: Content Alignment
Did the training content meet your expectations or learning needs?

☐ Yes

☐ Somewhat

☐ No

If applicable, what topics were missing or unclear?

SECTION 6: Quality & Usability Perceptions
Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

The modules were easy to navigate.

The videos and simulations were clear and helpful.

The content felt relevant to my role.

The pacing of the training was appropriate.

I would recommend this training to a colleague.

What was the most helpful aspect of the training design?

Were there any barriers or frustrations while navigating the training?

SECTION 7: Application
Have you used what you learned in the Composer training to build or update a webpage?

☐ Yes → go to next question

☐ No → skip to explanation

If Yes:

Please share the link to your Composer-built webpage (optional):

Which Composer features have you used? (Check all that apply)

☐ Page editor

☐ Adding images or files

☐ Banners or buttons

☐ Custom layouts

☐ Page navigation/structure tools

☐ Accessibility elements

☐ Other: _____

How did you learn to build or edit your page? (Check all that apply)

☐ Composer training modules

☐ A colleague helped me

☐ I figured it out by exploring

☐ I had prior experience

☐ Other: _____

If No:

Why haven't you used Composer to build or update a webpage yet? (Check all that apply)

☐ I haven't had time

☐ It's not relevant to my role

☐ I didn't feel confident enough

☐ I'm waiting to use it in the future

☐ Other: _____

If you used what you learned, describe one specific task you completed using Composer that you couldn't have done before. (Open-ended)

SECTION 8: Confidence
Before the training, how confident were you in using Composer?

☐ Not confident

☐ Somewhat confident

☐ Confident

☐ Very confident

After the training, how confident are you now?

☐ Not confident

☐ Somewhat confident

☐ Confident

☐ Very confident

What helped you feel more confident (if applicable)?

SECTION 9: Time & Effort
Approximately how much time did you spend on the Composer training modules?

☐ Less than 30 minutes

☐ 30 minutes to 1 hour

☐ 1-2 hours

☐ More than 2 hours

SECTION 10: Final Reflections
What worked well for you in the training?

What could be improved in future training offerings?

Module: Getting to Know Composer
Before taking this module, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ Confidently navigate through the CMS platform.

☐ Locate your site's production and instruction branches.

☐ Locate and understand how to configure and apply page settings.

Did the content in this module meet your expectations or needs?
☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain: (Open-ended)

Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree):

I learned how to: Confidently navigate through the CMS platform.

I learned how to: Locate your site's production and instruction branches.

I learned how to: Locate and understand how to configure and apply page settings.

The module was easy to navigate.

The videos/simulations were clear.

The content was relevant to my role.

The pacing was appropriate.

I would recommend this module to others.

Did you apply what you learned from this module?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, what did you apply? (Open-ended)

If No, why not? (Open-ended)

Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

After completing it?

☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

What was the most valuable thing you learned in this module? (Open-ended)

What improvements would make this module more helpful to you? (Open-ended)

Module: Finalsite's Philosophy & the Home Page

Why did you take this module? (Check all that apply)

☐ Required for my role

☐ Recommended by a colleague or admin

☐ Chose it to improve my skills

☐ Curious/self-motivated

☐ Other: _____

Before taking this module, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ Understand the do's and don'ts of working with your home page.

☐ Understand the concept of dynamic updating with modules.

Did the content in this module meet your expectations or needs?

☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain: (Open-ended)

Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree):

I learned how to: Understand the do's and don'ts of working with your home page.

I learned how to: Understand the concept of dynamic updating with modules.

The module was easy to navigate.

The videos/simulations were clear.

The content was relevant to my role.

The pacing was appropriate.

I would recommend this module to others.

Did you apply what you learned from this module?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, what did you apply? (Open-ended)

If No, why not? (Open-ended)

Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

After completing it?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

What was the most valuable thing you learned in this module? (Open-ended)

What improvements would make this module more helpful to you? (Open-ended)

Module: Using the Editor
Why did you take this module? (Check all that apply)

☐ Required for my role
☐ Recommended by a colleague or admin
☐ Chose it to improve my skills
☐ Curious/self-motivated
☐ Other: _____

Before taking this module, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ Use the editor to add content styled in various ways.

☐ Insert an image in a content element.

☐ Add hyperlinks.

☐ Add buttons.

Did the content in this module meet your expectations or needs?
☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain: (Open-ended)

Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree):

I learned how to: Use the editor to add content styled in various ways.

I learned how to: Insert an image in a content element.

I learned how to: Add hyperlinks.

I learned how to: Add buttons.

The module was easy to navigate.

The videos/simulations were clear.

The content was relevant to my role.

The pacing was appropriate.

I would recommend this module to others.

Did you apply what you learned from this module?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, what did you apply? (Open-ended)

If No, why not? (Open-ended)

Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

After completing it?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

What was the most valuable thing you learned in this module? (Open-ended)

What improvements would make this module more helpful to you? (Open-ended)

Module: The Element Library
Why did you take this module? (Check all that apply)

☐ Required for my role
☐ Recommended by a colleague or admin
☐ Chose it to improve my skills
☐ Curious/self-motivated
☐ Other: _____

Before taking this module, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ Add various elements from the element library.

☐ Investigate and apply common element settings.

Did the content in this module meet your expectations or needs?
☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain: (Open-ended)

Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree):

- I learned how to: Add various elements from the element library.

- I learned how to: Investigate and apply common element settings.

The module was easy to navigate.

The videos/simulations were clear.

The content was relevant to my role.

The pacing was appropriate.

I would recommend this module to others.

Did you apply what you learned from this module?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, what did you apply? (Open-ended)

If No, why not? (Open-ended)

Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

After completing it?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

What was the most valuable thing you learned in this module? (Open-ended)

What improvements would make this module more helpful to you? (Open-ended)

Module: Page Layouts

Why did you take this module? (Check all that apply)

☐ Required for my role

☐ Recommended by a colleague or admin

☐ Chose it to improve my skills

☐ Curious/self-motivated

☐ Other: _____

Before taking this module, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ Layout a page with various elements such as columns, accordions, and tabs.

☐ Add navigation elements.

Did the content in this module meet your expectations or needs?

☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain: (Open-ended)

Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree):

- I learned how to: Layout a page with various elements such as columns, accordions, and tabs.

- I learned how to: Add navigation elements.

The module was easy to navigate.

The videos/simulations were clear.

The content was relevant to my role.

The pacing was appropriate.

I would recommend this module to others.

Did you apply what you learned from this module?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, what did you apply? (Open-ended)

If No, why not? (Open-ended)

Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

After completing it?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

What was the most valuable thing you learned in this module? (Open-ended)

What improvements would make this module more helpful to you? (Open-ended)

Module: Manage Pages
Why did you take this module? (Check all that apply)

☐ Required for my role
☐ Recommended by a colleague or admin
☐ Chose it to improve my skills
☐ Curious/self-motivated
☐ Other: _____

Before taking this module, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ Publish pages.

☐ Add, delete, clone and move pages.

☐ Link pages.

Did the content in this module meet your expectations or needs?
☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain: (Open-ended)

Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree):

- I learned how to: Publish pages.

- I learned how to: Add, delete, clone and move pages.

- I learned how to: Link pages.

The module was easy to navigate.

The videos/simulations were clear.

The content was relevant to my role.

The pacing was appropriate.

I would recommend this module to others.

Did you apply what you learned from this module?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, what did you apply? (Open-ended)

If No, why not? (Open-ended)

Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

After completing it?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

What was the most valuable thing you learned in this module? (Open-ended)

What improvements would make this module more helpful to you? (Open-ended)

Module: Working with Banners
Why did you take this module? (Check all that apply)

☐ Required for my role
☐ Recommended by a colleague or admin
☐ Chose it to improve my skills
☐ Curious/self-motivated
☐ Other: _____

Before taking this module, what did you expect or hope to learn? (Check all that apply)

☐ Understand where banners are configured and edited.

☐ Learn how header and footer links are edited.

☐ Learn how to update location information.

☐ Learn how to apply banners to pages.

Did the content in this module meet your expectations or needs?
☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

If 'No' or 'Somewhat,' please explain: (Open-ended)

Rate the following statements (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree):

- I learned how to: Understand where banners are configured and edited.

- I learned how to: Learn how header and footer links are edited.

- I learned how to: Learn how to update location information.

- I learned how to: Learn how to apply banners to pages.

The module was easy to navigate.

The videos/simulations were clear.

The content was relevant to my role.

The pacing was appropriate.

I would recommend this module to others.

Did you apply what you learned from this module?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, what did you apply? (Open-ended)

If No, why not? (Open-ended)

Before taking this module, how confident were you in this topic?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

After completing it?
☐ Not confident ☐ Somewhat ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

What was the most valuable thing you learned in this module? (Open-ended)

What improvements would make this module more helpful to you? (Open-ended)

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview with Finalsite Employees

Introduction Script

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I'm conducting a program evaluation of the Composer Learning Path offered by Finalsite. The purpose of this interview is to understand your perspective on the development, implementation, and outcomes of the training. Your insights will help us understand how the training is working internally and where it could be improved.

With your permission, I'd like to record this conversation for accuracy in transcription. All information will be kept confidential, and your name will not appear in any reports or publications. You may skip any questions or end the interview at any time.

Section A: Background & Role

1. Can you describe your role at Finalsite and how it relates to the Composer Learning Path training?

2. What was your involvement in the development, delivery, or support of the Composer training?

Section B: Program Goals & Design

3. What were the original goals for the Composer Learning Path?

4. What did you want clients to be able to do after completing the training?

5. Were any specific learning design principles or client needs factored into the development?

Section C: Implementation & Fidelity

6. How closely do you feel the training was implemented as originally intended?

7. Were there any unexpected changes made after launch? Why?

Section D: Quality & Usability

8. What feedback have you received about the user experience of the training modules?

9. How do you monitor or evaluate the quality of the content?

Section E: Client Outcomes

10. Based on your experience, how has the training impacted client use of Composer?

11. Are there any client behaviors or patterns that seem to have changed post-training?

Section F: Improvements

12. What improvements (if any) are currently being considered for the training?

13. If you could change anything about the program, what would it be?

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview with District Administrators

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm conducting a program evaluation of the Composer Learning Path offered by Finalsite. The goal is to understand how the program is being used, what expectations administrators had, and how well those expectations are being met.

Your insights as a district leader will provide essential context around the decision to implement this training, its rollout, and how it aligns with district goals. This interview is confidential, and your responses will be used only for research purposes. You are free to skip any question or stop at any time.

Section A: Background & Role

1. Can you describe your role and how it relates to the implementation of Finalsite at your school or district?
2. How involved were you in the decision to adopt Finalsite and the Composer platform?

Section B: Motivation & Decision-Making

3. What prompted your district to choose Finalsite over other platforms?
4. Were there specific needs or problems you were trying to address through this training or platform?

Section C: Expectations

5. What did you expect teachers or staff to be able to do after completing the Composer training?

6. Were there specific outcomes or competencies you were looking to build?

Section D: Implementation Experience

7. How did you communicate or roll out the training to staff?
8. Were there any challenges during implementation or adoption?

Section E: Perceptions of Training Effectiveness

9. From your perspective, how has the training worked for your staff?
10. Have you seen any changes in how staff build pages, communicate with families, or use the platform overall?

Section F: Alignment with District Goals

11. How do the courses for Composer fit into your district's goals for communication, website use, or instructional technology?
12. Is the training meeting the needs you originally identified?

Section G: Feedback & Improvements

13. What feedback (if any) have you received from staff about the training?
14. What improvements would you recommend for the training moving forward?

Appendix D: IRB Approval

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: October 20, 2025 **IRB#:** 18989

Principal Investigator: Sarah Noon

Approval Date: 10/17/2025

Exempt Category: 4

Study Title: Evaluating Asynchronous Client Training in EdTech: A Program Evaluation of Finalsite's Composer Learning Path

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Eric Pennello, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix E: Consent Document

Consent to Participate in Research

University of Oklahoma

Signed Consent to Participate in Research

RETROACTIVE CONSENT FOR PREVIOUSLY CONDUCTED INTERVIEW

Would you like your previously collected data to be used in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Sarah Noon from the Department of the Educational Psychology department at the University of Oklahoma and I am seeking your retroactive consent to use data collected from an interview you participated in for my research entitled "Evaluation of Finalsite's Composer Learning Path Training Program." This research is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma. You were selected as a participant because you participated in the Finalsite Composer Learning Path training program. You must be at least 18 years of age to have your data included in this research.

This consent form is being provided to you after your interview was conducted. Your decision to provide or decline consent will determine whether the data from your interview can be used in this research study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions you may have BEFORE agreeing to allow your data to be used in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Finalsite's Composer Learning Path training program and to understand how participants experienced and applied the training in their work.

How many participants will be in this research? About 7 people will take part in this research.

What data was already collected from me? You participated in an interview on or about June 2025 that lasted approximately 15 minutes. During this interview:

- You were interviewed about your experience with the Finalsite Composer Learning Path training program
- Audio recording was made of the interview
- Video recording was made of the interview
- You provided demographic information about yourself

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing to allow the researcher to use the data already collected from you for the research purposes described in this document.

What are the risks and benefits if I participate?

Audio or video recorded data collection: There is a risk of accidental data release if we collected your data using audio and video recordings. If this occurred, your identity and statements you made would become known to people who are not on the research team. To minimize this risk, the researchers will transfer data to, and store your data on, a secure platform approved by the University's Information Technology Office.

Documents or records shared with the researcher: You were asked to transfer documents, images, or other personal records to the researchers in this research. There is a risk that someone not part of the research team may gain access to this data. To minimize this risk, when we received your data, we transferred the data to, and stored your data on, a secure platform approved by the University's Information Technology Office.

Collection of demographic or geographic location data that could lead to deductive re-identification: You were asked to provide demographic information that describes you. We may also gather information about your geographic location in this research. Different combinations of personal and geographic information may make it possible for your identity to be guessed by someone who was given, or gained access, to our research records. To minimize the risk of deductive re-identification, we will not combine identifying variables nor analyze and report results for small groups of people with specific demographic characteristics.

What are the benefits if I participate? There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. However, your participation may contribute to improving training programs and understanding professional development experiences.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

Who will see my information? Your responses will be de-identified, meaning identifying information will be removed or replaced with codes. There will be no information in research reports that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and

only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. However, you may not access this information until the entire research has finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not provide consent for your data to be used, your interview data will be destroyed and will not be included in the research. You will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to provide consent, you can withdraw your consent and have your data removed from the research at any time before 12/31/2026

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential? Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you agree to be identified. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree for data records to include my identifiable information. ___ Yes ___ No

I agree to be quoted directly, without the use of my name. ___ Yes ___ No

I agree to have my name reported with quoted material. ___ Yes ___ No

I agree for my research data to be archived for scholarly and public access. ___ Yes ___ No

What will happen to my data in the future? We might share your de-identified data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

Audio Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your responses, your interview was recorded on an audio recording device. By providing consent, you are agreeing to allow this recording to be used for research purposes.

I consent to the use of my audio recording for this research. ___ Yes ___ No

Video Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your responses, your interview was recorded on a video recording device. By providing consent, you are agreeing to allow this recording to be used for research purposes.

I consent to the use of my video recording for this research. ___ Yes ___ No

Use of Documents/Records Shared with the Researcher You shared documents, images, or other records with the researcher during your interview. By providing consent, you are agreeing to allow these materials to be used for research purposes.

I consent to the use of documents/records I shared for this research. ___ Yes ___ No

Will I be contacted again? The researcher might contact you to gather additional data or recruit you for new research.

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future. ___ Yes ___ No

Who do I contact with questions, concerns, or complaints? If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, contact me at:

Principal Investigator: Sarah Noon

Email: sarah.noon-1@ou.edu

Phone: 703-498-8642

Faculty Advisor: Maeghan N. Hennessey

Email: maeghan@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By signing below, I agree to allow my interview data to be used in this research.

Are you 18 years of age or older? _____ (If no, data cannot be used)

Participant Signature	**Print Name**	**Date :**

Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	**Print Name**	**Date :**

IRB #: _____

IRB Approval Date: _____