



"Him flying at school"
*Jordan draws a picture of what he
 looks like with wings.*

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note: This public report is

designed to provide a brief summary of the Early Learning Centre and its activities, and of the evaluation results of the TLC³ program components for the period 1999-2002. Staff of the Early Learning Centre have condensed Barbara Kahan's original report to create this document. All names used in this report have been changed. For the full report, please contact the Regina Early Learning Centre at (306) 757-3744 or regina_elc@accesscomm.ca

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Executive Summary

The Early Learning Centre was one of seven centres across Canada selected to participate in the TLC³ project, sponsored by The Lawson Foundation and administered by The Hincks-Dellcrest Institute.

ELC and its programs

Established in 1977, the Early Learning Centre (ELC) is a community-based organization whose mission is to work cooperatively with low income families to provide programs that foster the healthy development of children from birth to five years of age. Funding from TLC³, a five year project that began in 1997, made possible the addition of:

- PAT, (Parents as Teachers) a home visiting program geared to families with children under the age of three
- the family literacy programs Come Read With Me and PRINTS (Parents' Roles Interacting with Teachers) to the Family Outreach program, and
- an augmentation of the already existing Preschool program. The augmentation of the Preschool program included an increased emphasis on cognitive and language development, enhanced child assessment practices, increased staff skills, and institution of regular parent-staff supper meetings.

A fourth program area, Family Support (in-home support such as life and home management skills for families facing critical issues), was not directly affected by TLC³.

ELC children and families

All children participating in ELC programs were born in Canada and spoke English; over three quarters of children had at least one parent of Aboriginal ancestry. All children came from low income homes. As well, some of the children faced additional challenges including neglect, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, behavioural issues, a diagnosed developmental concern, and time spent in foster care.

A single parent headed the largest proportion of children's families. Families were mobile, and household income was low. The main source of income for most households was Social Assistance or Child Tax Benefit, followed by wages or salaries, then educational funding and other sources. Compared to over-all figures for Regina, mothers were young, and parents' education status was low.



A PAT parent and child share a quiet moment.

Evaluation findings

The evaluation period was from 1999-2002, the last three years of the project. Drawing on a variety of sources, quantitative and qualitative methods were used to answer the evaluation questions. A brief summary of results follows:

PAT records

PAT records indicate:

- parent educators were proactive in assisting with children's healthy development and,
- there were positive effects on parents and children

ECERS® scores

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (Harms, Clifford, Cryer, 1997) scores were used to rate the preschool environment. Rating categories included space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff. Results for all three years of the evaluation were very positive.

PES scores

Results of PES (Preschool Evaluation Scale, McCartney 1994) scores for ELC preschool children were positive for the three areas reviewed: cognitive thinking, expressive language, and social emotional development. The standardization of these scores means that changes were less likely to be due to children's maturation process and more likely due to the ELC preschool program.

Portfolio analysis

Portfolio analysis confirms PES findings. Children improved in cognitive development, language development, social-emotional development, creativity, and planning.

Children's survey

Children in the preschool program were asked what they liked about the program. The largest category of responses was play. Arts and crafts was the second largest category.

Case studies

The case studies of five children who participated in the preschool program illustrated the range of strengths children have to draw on and the range of challenges they have to face. All five children demonstrated positive change in one or more areas. The nature of this change varied from child to child.

Parent surveys

Parent surveys and feedback forms indicated a high degree of satisfaction with all TLC? related programs, and positive change as a result of program activities.

Key informant interviews

Following is a summary of points raised by one or more key informants (some internal and some external to ELC):

- conditions in the external environment are difficult for young children and their families, and for ELC
- ELC is doing an excellent job despite a lack of resources
- ELC staff are extremely dedicated and caring despite low wages and heavy workload
- there is a close and positive relationship between ELC and parents
- the general community is aware of ELC, which is highly respected locally and nationally; ELC is well integrated within a network of community organizations
- lack of stable, ongoing funding at an adequate level is a critical issue for ELC

- ELC exemplifies the term “continuous improvement” through its practice of ongoing learning and reflection, receptiveness to new ideas and innovation, and constructive problem solving approach
- TLC³ had a positive impact on ELC
- ELC activities benefit all children, but in different ways, depending on the child and his or her particular issues; ELC also impacts positively on parents and the broader community
- theories and beliefs fundamental to any organization working in the area of early childhood development range from the belief in the need to support families to the belief that relationships are key to learning
- suggestions for others range from the importance of taking children where they’re at to understanding how different parts fit together and complement each other



Best practices check-in

ELC teaching staff’s review of processes and activities indicates a strong consistency between their practice and underpinnings (such as values), and practice and understanding of the environment.

Conclusion

Evaluation findings were very positive. The report concluded that TLC³ program components directly and indirectly contributed to many benefits for children, parents and the community. ELC, by using an approach solidly based on continual improvement, alignment of practice with values, and good relationships at all levels, has produced excellent results by implementing the TLC³ project.

These positive results have a number of implications for ELC, policy makers and the broader Saskatchewan community.

First, they validate the work of ELC and suggest the importance of ELC securing a more adequate funding base to allow the program to continue delivering existing programs. Ideally, funding should also provide ELC with opportunities to refine and expand upon its existing programs.

Second, these results join a growing body of information that documents the effectiveness of early childhood programs and provides an illustration of a program within a Saskatchewan context.

Third, the evaluation report presents findings that have the potential to provide valuable guidance and insight to other programs working within a uniquely Saskatchewan context.

Program Description

TLC³, a project for early childhood language and cognitive development, was sponsored by The Lawson Foundation and administered by The Hincks-Delcrest Institute. The Early Learning Centre was one of seven centres across Canada selected to participate in this project.

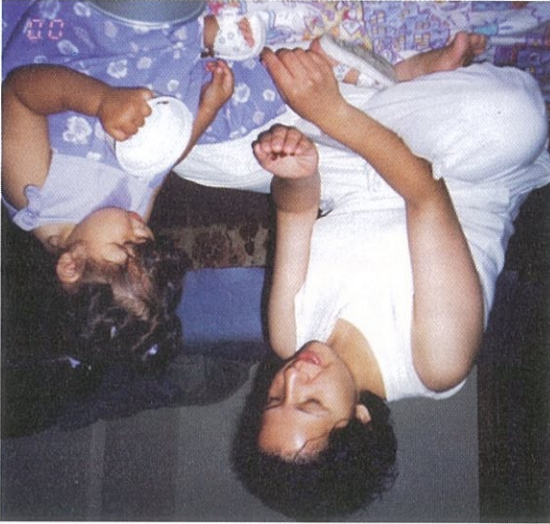
Established in 1977, the Early Learning Centre (ELC) is a community-based organization whose mission is to work cooperatively with low income families to provide programs that foster the healthy development of children from birth to five years of age. Funding from TLC³, a five year project that began in 1997, made possible the addition of: PAT (a program geared to families with children under the age of three), a family literacy component to the Family Outreach program (in the form of Come Read With Me and PRINTS), and an augmentation of the already existing Preschool program. The augmentation of the Preschool program included:

- an increased focus on cognitive and language development through the implementation of High Scope strategies, the Reggio Emilia approach, and more time from the speech language pathologist; enhanced child assessment practices through the adoption of PES and further refinement of portfolio documentation; an increase in staff skills through ongoing professional development; and, the institution of regular parent-staff supper meetings that include an educational component.

A fourth program area, Family Support (in-home support such as life and home management skills for families facing critical issues), was not directly affected by TLC³.

PAT

PAT (Parents as Teachers) was introduced as a TLC³ program in 1999 (one and a half years into the TLC³ project). The purpose of PAT is to enhance both the parent-child bond and the development of young children from birth to age three. There is a wait-list for participation in PAT. Families are selected according to their place on the list, although families with severe challenges are given a priority. A referral is not required. PAT children are guaranteed a place in the preschool program. PAT staff includes the PAT coordinator who oversees the program and parent educators who do the home visits. Fifteen families (16 children) participated in the PAT program for a year or more during the evaluation period.



A parent-child activity is introduced and practised during each home visit.

Descriptions of PAT program components follow.

Developmental screening

PAT children are screened using different instruments for the level of overall development, language, hearing, and vision. For example, referrals might be made to physicians or speech language pathologists.

Lending library

The lending library provides toys and books for families to borrow. A toy catalogue is available for parents to choose from.

Home visits

Once a month the parent educator spends approximately an hour with each PAT family (parents and children) in their home. Each session includes:

- discussion about the child's developmental stage
- discussion regarding parents' specific questions and concerns
- an activity designed to encourage development
- provision of handouts related to development
- possibly a video, for example on children's language development
- observations related to language, social, intellectual and fine or gross motor development
- follow up suggestions for family activities
- follow up suggestions for parent educator
- exchange of toys and books from the lending library.



While on a visit, the family enjoys a PAT activity.

Group meetings

Open to all PAT parents. Group meetings include:

- a guided discussion on a variety of developmental issues;

- opportunity for parents to share learnings and experiences with each other and take part in parent-child activities; and,
- provision of transportation and childcare

Preschool Program

The preschool program is for children ages three to five whose families fall below a low income ceiling. There is a wait-list for enrolment

in the preschool program. Children are selected according to their place on



the list, with two exceptions. Priority is given to children participating in the PAT program who are guaranteed a place in the preschool program, and families with severe challenges that might compromise the well-being of the children (identified by professionals from other agencies or ELC staff). A referral is not required. The maximum enrolment is 96 children at any one time. The majority of them attend for at least one complete program year: in 2000-1, 81 of a possible 96 children attended for a complete year and in 2001-2, 76 children completed the entire year.

TLC³ funding augmented the already existing preschool program by making possible:

- enhanced cognitive programming through the introduction of High Scope strategies (the plan-do-review process in particular) and the integration of Reggio Emilia approaches into classroom activities
- enhanced language programming through an increase in speech language pathologist services
- enhanced child assessment practices

through the introduction of the Preschool Evaluation Scale (PES) and a major refinement in the documentation of children's portfolios

- the institution of regular parent-staff supper meetings which include an educational component

- professional development opportunities related to cognitive and language development and assessment, through workshops facilitated by external professionals, as well as an ongoing review of recent literature and discussion.

Following are descriptions of preschool program components, into which TLC³ funded enhancements are integrated (as identified above).

General classroom activities

Children attend ELC four half days a week, and are transported by vans. Each of the four classrooms (Blue, Green, Red, and Yellow) has a maximum of 24 children. Twelve attend in the morning and another 12 in the afternoon. For every class there is a teacher and a teacher associate. At least one member of the teaching team is of Aboriginal descent. Children are actively engaged in planning, doing, and reflecting on their activities by



Playing outside provides children with valuable time for more socialization as well as an opportunity to build coordination.

Supplementary activities

Regular activities include:

- field trips, visits to the library and other special events

- weekly music time, facilitated by a music therapist complements the daily musical activities in the classroom

- visits by the speech language pathologist who spends four hours a week in the classrooms. After initial observations and

Field trips provide the children with the chance to explore and learn outside the classroom and explore the outdoor environment in which they live.



learning through play and a hands-on experiential approach. In addition, staff identify and respond to children's individual needs. Daily curriculum includes: circle time, free play, a nutritious snack, tooth brushing, story time, outdoor or gym time and small group time. There are opportunities for children to plan and reflect throughout these activities. As well, stories, conversations about topics meaningful to the children, and problem solving occur throughout the day. Woven throughout all activities are cognitive, language and social components. For example, at tooth brushing time children will identify the colours of the toothbrushes. Learning materials include sand, water, paint, clay, manipulatives (such as beads and peg boards), computer, toys, books, dress-up clothes, and a play house.

assessments during the first month of the school year, the speech language pathologist works directly with the children in the classroom setting; by modelling, imitating and expanding their language.

Family involvement

Families are involved with the preschool program in several ways. Parents are encouraged to share their hobbies and skills in



the classroom. Each family receives four home visits a year for information sharing. There are regular

parent/teacher social and educational evenings, which include a potluck supper and guest resource people.

Transportation and childcare are provided.

Screening and Assessment

Screening and assessment occurs in the classroom in a number of different ways, including:

- ongoing observation by teaching staff
- use of the PES by teaching staff
- review of portfolios
- assessment by speech and language pathologist
- dental screening by public health dental health educators who come into the classroom once a year. Family Outreach follows up if treatment is required, and Four Directions provides fluoride applications

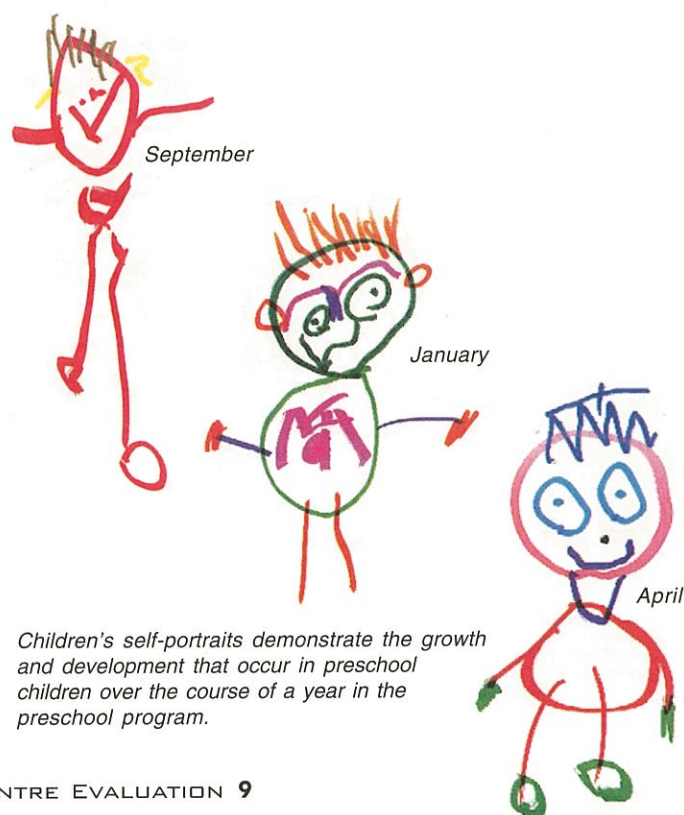
Professional Development

Professional development for teaching staff also occurs in a number of different ways:

- speech and language pathologist is available for consultations with teaching staff. She works with staff to improve their ability to create a language rich environment, to develop strategies to increase children's language skills, and to plan for and respond to children's language needs
- the program has weekly scheduled time for teaching staff to read journal articles, brainstorm ideas, and generally reflect on effective practices to use in the classroom
- staff participate in a variety of workshops throughout the year

Transition strategy

Teaching staff meet with Public and Catholic School Board personnel every year in late winter or early spring to discuss the needs of children who will be entering kindergarten in the fall. School Board personnel then arrange special assistance for children who will require it.



Evolution of a classroom project: The Scythian Café

The Scythian Café Project shows the evolution of a project at the preschool. It also shows how alert the teaching staff is to the children's ideas and how they incorporate the ideas into a learning approach.

We took the children to the Mackenzie Art Gallery to see the baskets made by Mi'kmaq artist Peter Clair. As we were leaving, the children walked through the Café Gerbois set up as part of the "Impressionist Masterworks from the National Gallery of Canada" exhibit. The children saw the tables decorated by local artists and were impressed with the different techniques used on each table.

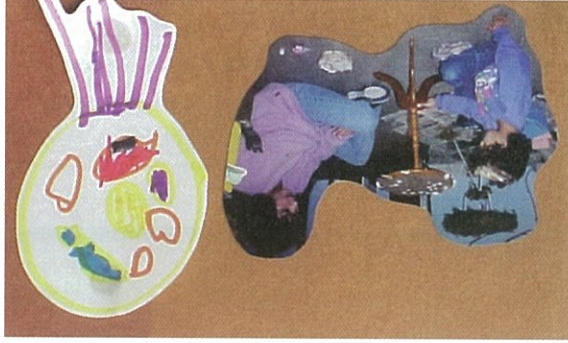
[Back in the classroom] the children asked to take playdough into the playhouse to make food. We talked about who would eat the food. The children decided to open a café like the one at the Art Gallery. The children brainstormed what they would need.

One child said, "We should use baskets to serve the food." The children liked how the different tables were collaged at the Art Gallery. We looked through art books and discussed different types of materials we could use to make our own tables. The teaching staff gathered materials for six tables. First the children chose the table they wanted to create. Then they drew sketches and plans of how they wanted their tables to look. Over the next four months the tables were created. The teachers set up stations that included children's plans and photographs. Children used their problem-solving skills to find ways to create their tables.

When the tables were complete the children visited a coffee shop to see what else they could include in their café. They brought back ideas for a fireplace, menus and other props to add to their own café. Throughout the project the

children played "restaurant." Language skills were developed through stimulating conversations and social interactions.

The project culminated in a grand opening. The community was invited to celebrate the children's accomplishments. Also, the tables were exhibited publicly in the Saskatchewan Legislative Building and Regina City Hall.



Children created plans for their tables, gathered materials, and worked together to create their tables. Above, children work together to add the shells to the edges of their table. They also discuss additions and changes to be made to the table as they work.



Plans for the "bird nest" table.



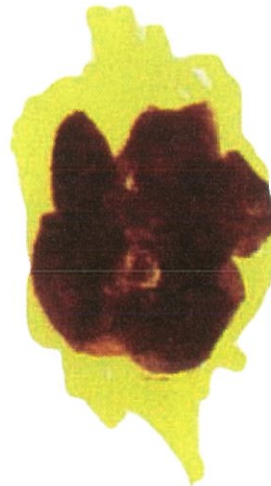
The finished product.



"Chocolate cake with grape icing."

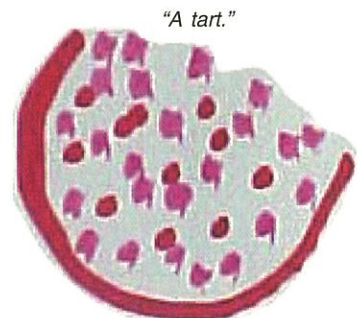


"Hot chocolate."



"A cookie."

The children copied words and drew pictures of the foods that they would serve in their café.



"A tart."

Family Outreach

Family Outreach programs are available for all families participating in PAT or the preschool program. In addition to the family literacy programs funded by TLC³ (described below), Family Outreach provides activities for parents such as craft sessions, clothing fairs, parenting programs, and Child Health Clinics (in collaboration with Four Directions Community Health Centre).

TLC³ funding augmented the already existing Family Outreach Program by adding two family literacy programs:

Come Read With Me

CRWM introduces families to the importance of reading to young children. Through a series of four or five group meetings facilitated by Family Outreach staff, parents discover things like:

- qualities that make a good book
- techniques for looking at and reading books together, and
- activities and games to accompany storybooks.

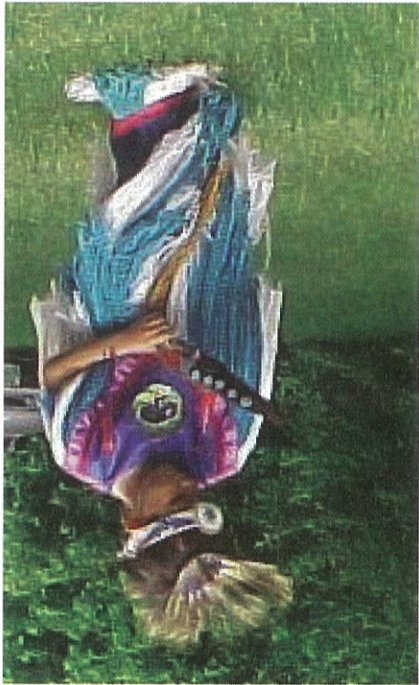
In addition, parents learn rhymes, finger plays and songs, and receive a book to take home and share with children. In the last two years, Parent and Child Together Time (PACCTT) was added where parents read a book and do an activity with their children. Transportation and childcare are provided.



PRINTS

The Parents Interacting with Teacher Support family literacy program builds on Come Read With Me. It also involves a series of group meetings. As with Come Read With Me, transportation and childcare are provided. PRINTS introduces parents to the following literacy steps:

- talk and oral language
- play
- book and book sharing
- environmental print (symbols or print in the world around us)
- scribbling, drawing and writing

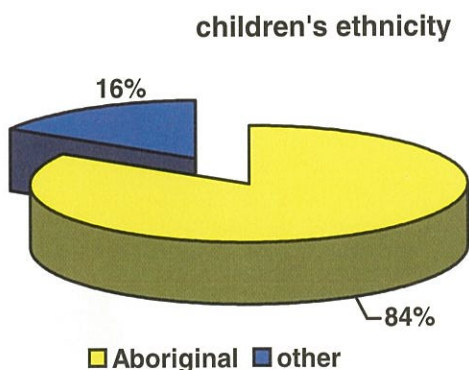


Description of ELC Children and Families

All children participating in ELC programs were born in Canada and spoke English; over three quarters of children (84% of those for whom ancestry was reported) had at least one parent of Aboriginal ancestry.

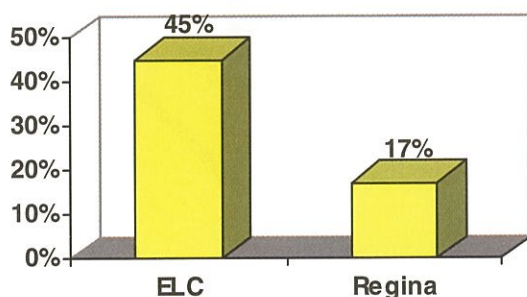
While all children came from low income homes, specific challenges faced by individual children participating in the preschool program included:

- behavioural issues (14%),
- neglect (14%)
- physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (6%)
- a diagnosis for developmental issues (3%), and
- some time spent in foster care (11%).



A single parent headed the largest proportion of children's families (45%, compared to 17% for all of Regina in 1996).

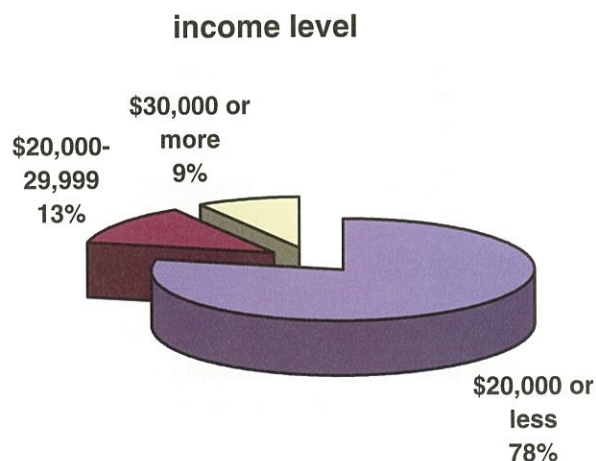
percent of single parent families



Children's families were mobile. A third of families for whom data was available indicated they had lived for less than a year at their current residence.

Household income was low. 78% of households reported an annual income of less than \$20,000.

The main source of income for most households (55%) was Social Assistance or Child Tax Benefit, followed by wages or salaries (26%), then educational funding and other sources.



A sizeable proportion of mothers were young. 44% (of those for whom data was available) were 19 years old or younger when their first child was born (compared to 11% of women giving birth in Regina in 2000). Parents' education status was low. Only 21% of mothers and 16% of fathers (of those for whom data was available) had some post secondary training (compared to 54% of people in Regina in 1996).

Summary of Findings

The evaluation was conducted as part of the TLC³ project and was carried out over the final three years of the project, from 1999-2002. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to answer the evaluation questions.

A summary of findings follows.

ECERS® scores

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS®) was used to rate the preschool environment. Categories included: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff. All results were very positive. For all three years, all categories received scores higher than 5 and many received a 7 (5 is considered "good" and 7 "excellent").

PAT records

PAT records indicate the parent educators were very proactive in identifying issues, providing support, and suggesting further steps for encouraging children's development. Records also indicate positive effects on parents (such as an increase in parenting skills) and children (such as improvement in speech).

PES (Preschool Evaluation Scale, McCaune, 1994)

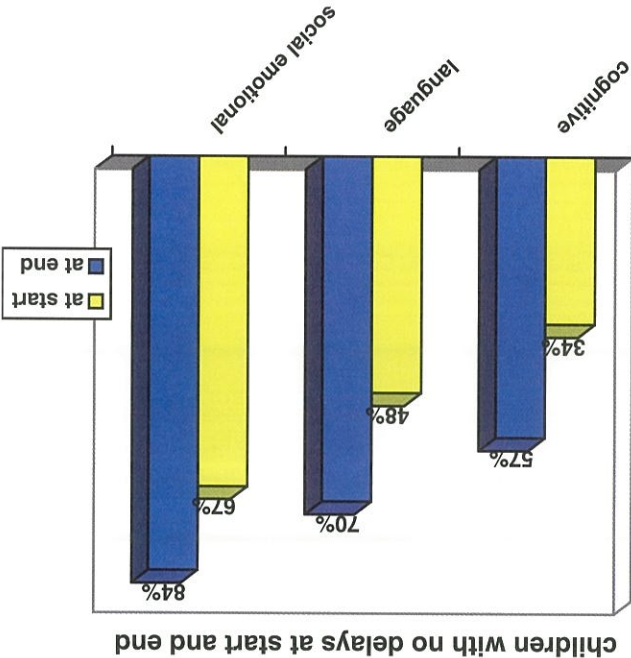
Results of PES scores for ELC preschool children were positive for all three areas reviewed: cognitive thinking, expressive language, and social emotional development. The standardization of these scores means that changes were less likely to be due to children's maturation process and more likely due to the ELC preschool program. Specific findings included the following:

- In all three areas the number of children in the normal range increased between the time they started the preschool program and the time they finished. A number of children who started with a severe delay improved to a moderate delay.

- A higher proportion of children had cognitive thinking delays than had expressive language or social emotional delays at both start and end of children's time in the program.

- Children with cognitive thinking delays were least likely to move up one or more levels.

- Children with severe or moderate social emotional delays (the lowest proportion of the three areas at beginning and end) were most likely to move up one or more levels.



- The middle year for cognitive thinking and expressive language areas showed the least amount of change (there were only two years of data for social emotional rather than three); it appears likely that this second year dip was because of the higher proportion of children with delays starting the second year (2000-2001) with issues such as behaviour problems, developmental diagnoses, abuse, neglect, and living in foster care.
- Two associations between children's change to another level and other variables were positive and statistically significant: as parents' level of education increased the likelihood of positive expressive language change increased, and there was less likelihood of positive cognitive thinking change when the child had experienced abuse or neglect.
- **cognitive development**
Children increased their drawing abilities and knowledge of body parts, knowledge of colours, knowledge of numbers, and literacy/writing skills.
- **language development**
Children improved their syntax: measured in this case by number of words and morphemes per sentence (morphemes are the smallest unit of meaning). Semantics (the ability to express nuances of meaning) also improved. Children's use of pragmatics (using language with purpose) was evident from the beginning. At age 5, ELC preschool children's number of words spoken per sentence was, on average, very close to the standard level.
- **social emotional development**
Children began saying "please" and "thank-you," became more extroverted (for example, more willing to answer a question in front of the class, perform in front of others, join others in dramatic play, and contribute their ideas), and learned how to take turns. In addition, noticeable improvements were observed among those with initial difficulty concentrating.

Portfolios

Portfolio analysis confirms PES findings. The portfolios of 16 children (who appear to be representative of the other preschool children) were analyzed and showed improvements in the following areas:



Age: 4 years and 8 months

A simple portrait is drawn at the beginning of the year. The main circle includes the head and body with the arms and legs extending outwards.

Age: 5 years and 2 months

By the end of the year, the same child can draw in detail. The portrait is far more complex. The head and body are separated by a neck, and the body parts are two dimensional. Clothes have been added as well as eyelashes, eyebrows and ears.



Children's survey

Children in the preschool program were asked what they liked about the program. The largest category of responses was play. Arts and crafts were the second largest category. Some children mentioned language related and social activities.

Case studies

The case studies of five children who participated in the preschool program illustrated the range of strengths children have to draw on and the range of challenges they have to face. All five children selected for the case studies demonstrated positive change in one or more areas, though the nature of this change varied from child to child. The following are some highlights from three of these case studies.

Natanis

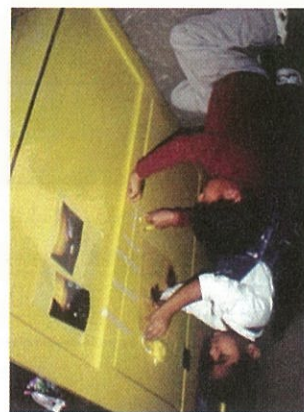
Natanis had intravertine growth retardation and prenatal exposure to Talwin and Ritalin, so her cognitive level was diagnosed as low average. She had been in foster homes from birth or shortly after birth.

During her stay in the program, she made improvements in her speech; her sentences were longer; she started to add articles ("a" and "the") and conjunctions ("and"), and her vocabulary was larger. When tested by the school board, her verbal scores were in line with her nonverbal scores, that is, her language level was consistent with her cognitive ability and she was working to her potential. Over time her attention span increased, and she began to interact with other children rather than focusing exclusively on adults.

She made a large gain in independence during the program. In September 2000, she would wait for others to do things for her. By May 2001, she had learned to ask for things she

Participation in and enthusiasm for creative activities such as art, music, and creative play increased during the year.

creativity

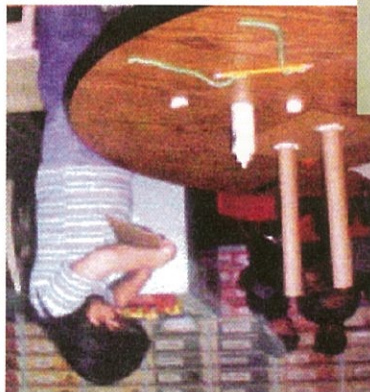


When the playhouse door broke, the children came up with a creative solution. First they taped the door shut so no one would use it. When that didn't work, a child decided to put a sign on the door to keep others from using it. Finally the children decided they needed a new handle. They walked to the hardware store to get the materials they needed to repair the door.

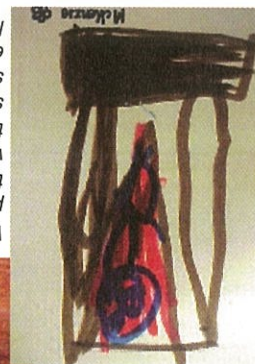


Children were more able as the year went on to explain coherently and with detail what they planned to do, and more able to follow through with their plans and verbally recall them.

planning



While working on our dinosaur playground project, we encouraged the children to plan the item they wanted to build. One child chose to build a swing. She drew her swing and gathered the materials she needed. Through trial and error, she made the swing work to her expectations.



needed, was doing things for herself, and learning to find appropriate solutions to her problems rather than getting angry. Teaching staff felt that she had a deep core of strength, and that she was “one of those who’s going to get back up and give as good as she got.”

Dakota

Dakota was a loveable, happy child. He lived with his mother, who was a student, two older sisters, and two younger brothers. According to his PES scores, he began his first year in the preschool program with severe delays in cognitive thinking, expressive language and social emotional areas. By the end of his second year, his PES scores indicated he had no expressive language or social emotional delays, though he still had a severe cognitive thinking delay.

According to the speech language pathologist, in Dakota’s second year, his sentences increased in length and he was better able to put sentences together. According to teaching staff, in his first year the other children didn’t want to play with him; by his second year, however, he had learned to go more gently and not only made friends easily but had become something of a leader.

Dakota’s attention span increased during his time in the preschool program to the point where he was able to finish activities. Dakota made improvements cognitively. His portfolio provides an example of the links Dakota started to make between books and play. In March 2002 (his last year in the preschool program), when playing in the sand, Dakota told the teacher he was making a spider. After the teacher pointed him to the spider books and he looked through them, he ran back to the sand table saying he needed to make a web, like the one in the book. While working in the sand box he kept going back to the table to consult the books.

Prairie-Dawn

Prairie-Dawn was a cooperative, extremely quiet little girl. Among her strong points were her artistic abilities and fine motor skills — she was good at drawing and printing. According to PES scores, Prairie-Dawn initially had a moderate delay in her social emotional development. This improved to the point of no delay by the end of her last year in the ELC preschool program. Her portfolio indicates she grew in confidence and developed friendships. Teaching staff commented that she wasn’t as shy as she had been at the beginning of the program. Also, her severe cognitive thinking delay (as measured by PES scores) improved to a moderate delay. Her portfolio provides the following example of change in her language. Prairie-Dawn moved from identifying plans only by pointing to the area where she wanted to play, to the point where she was able to verbalize her plans and then, after following through on them, provide a description of what she had done. Teaching staff felt that while she scored in the low range of development, in general she was working to her full capabilities.



Parent surveys

Parent surveys and feedback forms indicated a high degree of satisfaction with all TLC³-related programs, and positive change as a result of program activities.

PAT

Parents liked a number of things about PAT home visits, ranging from knowledge gained about developmental stages to the parent-child activities. Parents indicated they learned a number of things from home visits. For example, they gained a better understanding of children's language development and that it's all right to play with your child. Most parents read the PAT handouts, found them useful, and tried to use the information. When the Toy and Book Lending Library became operational, most parents indicated they had used it.

Preschool program

Parents listed a number of changes occurring in children as a result of their participation in the preschool program. Social and emotional development was the most frequent response. Increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, increase in cognitive and language skills, and exposure to Aboriginal culture were also noted. Parents liked the home visits because they were informative, and because they strengthened the home-preschool link.

Family Outreach

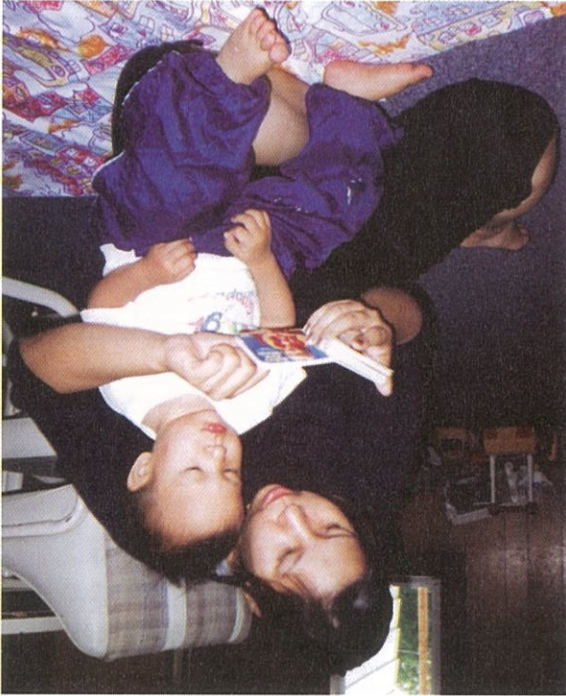
Parents liked Family Outreach activities because they gained information, knowledge and skills; experienced fun, enjoyment, relaxation and connections with others. Parents indicated they used a number of things they learned through the activities at home. Survey results confirm that provision of transportation and childcare was important to parents' participation in Family Outreach events.

Come Read With Me

Parents indicated that their participation in this program resulted in an increase in knowledge and the application of this knowledge at home, enjoyment, and exposure to books from Aboriginal and other cultures. Parents noted that children showed an increased attention span and interest in books.

PRINTS

Parents said that they used the activities they learned at PRINTS' sessions at home in a number of different ways. They also indicated that their participation in PRINTS increased both their and their children's knowledge, changed the quantity and quality of parent-child interactions, and increased their children's enjoyment of learning.



Key informant interviews

Following is a summary of points raised by one or more key informants. Informants were both internal and external to ELC.

Conditions in the external environment

Young children and their families are affected by complex issues like poverty, which ELC cannot change.

ELC in general and program specifics

ELC is doing an excellent job with limited resources. There would be a gap if ELC didn't exist. Its programs have many strengths. As one respondent commented:

"we were so impressed and amazed by so much around the ELC and their dedication and commitment, just the respect, and the high esteem that they held the children and their families in...they're modelling good early childhood development policy and programming, it's not just something on a piece of paper, they're culturally affirming and all the rest of it"

Staff

ELC staff are extremely dedicated and caring. They continue to work at ELC, despite the low wages and heavy workload that result from a low level of funding. They feel they are making a positive contribution to children and their families and they experience a sense of community at ELC.

"the collaborative approach is empowering, creates a community, where everyone has a role, something to offer, each is recognized as equally important and feels vital to the ELC community"

Relationship between ELC and parents

There is a close relationship between ELC and parents. Parents are formally involved with ELC through:

- the parent-controlled board
- programs specifically for families
- contact with teaching staff during home visits
- parent-teacher supper meetings, and
- visiting and participating in the classrooms.

Parents are comfortable at the ELC because of the qualities exhibited by staff, program qualities and supports, past experience with ELC and what they have heard from families and friends about ELC.

Community profile and links

The ELC is highly respected locally and nationally. For example, ELC received the Canada Post Literacy Award in 1999. In addition, ELC is well integrated into a network of community organizations ranging from participation in inter-agency committees to working relationships with a number of organizations such as Four Directions Health Centre, Child and Youth Services, SIAST, and Public and Catholic School Boards.

Funding

Lack of stable, ongoing funding at an adequate level is a critical issue for ELC.

Continual improvement

ELC exemplifies the term "continual improvement" through its practice of ongoing learning and reflection, receptiveness to new ideas and innovation, and constructive problem solving approaches.

"ELC staff are always receptive to listening to and trying new ideas, to learning and changing; they have an emergent program where their whole structure incorporates this approach"

Impacts

Respondents noted a number of different impacts at different levels:

- TLC³ had a positive impact on ELC from addition of new programs and new program strategies to more staff and parent training and skill development.
- ELC activities benefit all children, but in different ways (for example, in improved language, cognitive, and social skills), depending on the child and their particular issues.

"there are really good changes in language, and cognitive

[development], over all, just from being around the Centre, I can compare from when they first started, their thinking process, that has improved, just from being here, around other children...the self-esteem, confidence in themselves, learning to cope with stresses...recognizing their feelings, their anger...they become more sophisticated in their relationships with other children"

- ELC impacts on parents include an

increase in parenting knowledge and skills, a positive change in attitude to education and greater involvement in children's and their own education, a greater recognition of their own strengths, increase in social supports, and access to concrete supports.

"it's nice to just have someone on

hand to ask the every-day little things – [the PAT parent educator] was very good, very knowledgeable – everything I'd ask about, sleeping habits or whatever, she'd find handouts and give suggestions"

"it has significant impact on parents whose children are involved, primarily First Nations, their school experience hasn't been very positive, ELC breaks

down some of these barriers so they feel a part of their child's educational experience, they're not afraid to walk through the front door of the school"

- ELC impacts on the broader community include dissemination of knowledge and expertise, providing a model for other organizations, coordination with other initiatives and the contribution of ELC parents with enhanced skills to other organizations.

"[we help] the community understand the real lives of people and how everything really works together, raise issues of justice and equity in positive ways...create a perception in the community that goes against traditional racist dividing attitudes, share the strengths of families and children"

Best practices check-in

ELC teaching staff's review of processes and activities indicates a strong consistency between their practice and understandings/understanding of the environment. (Underpinnings include values, goals, ethics, theories, underlying beliefs, and evidence. Understanding of the environment includes vision and analysis for the organization and for the issue of healthy development.)



Discussion of Evaluation Results

Evaluation results are discussed below.

TLC³ objectives

All of ELC's general TLC³ objectives were met. In addition, the results of the evaluation (for the time period 1999-2002) indicate that, as far as can be told given available data, short term objectives for TLC³ components were also met:

PAT

PAT addressed children's developmental needs and capacities through ongoing screening, referrals to community resources, and identification of strategies for parents to use with their children. Children participating in PAT were prepared for a smooth transition into ELC's preschool program. Parent survey responses indicate that they increased their knowledge and understanding of children's developmental stages, and of activities they could do with children to support their child's development.

Preschool

Evidence is strong that the preschool program assisted children with cognitive and language delays to increase their skill levels. In addition, findings indicate that all children improved in at least some ways. Child assessment practices were enhanced through use of PES, refining of portfolio documentation, and ongoing professional development. The program also facilitated children's entrance into the school system by increasing children's developmental levels and through its transition strategy

Family literacy

Parent responses on Come Read With Me and PRINTS evaluation forms indicate that parents successfully applied the knowledge they learned from the two programs in terms of

participating in specific literacy activities with their children and in general interactions with their children. They gained knowledge in the importance of language and literature, the value of play, and specific literacy activities to engage in with their children.

Overall impact

The TLC³ project was responsible for a number of positive impacts:

Impact on ELC in general

TLC³ impacts on ELC programming were noted in the the previous section describing the program. TLC³ also impacted positively on the organization as a whole through an increase in:

- credibility
- networking opportunities
- financial stability
- focus on accountability and evaluation issues
- staff development

Impact on children

As discussed above PAT, the preschool and family literacy programs had positive impacts on children.

Impact on parents

Impacts on parents directly attributable to TLC³ program components included an increase in knowledge through PAT and family literacy programs, and application of that knowledge (at least in the case of family literacy). The ELC impacted on parents in these ways:

- general increase in parenting knowledge and skills
- a change to a positive attitude towards education

- increased confidence
- increased social support and feeling of belonging

Impact on community

ELC activities had a positive impact on the community:

- increased awareness concerning early childhood development and related issues
- provision of an effective model
- a role in the continuum of integrated services
- contribution of ELC parents with enhanced skills to other organizations

To summarize, major impacts included:

- increased identification of challenges affecting children, and a decrease in number of children with cognitive and language delays
- increase in parents' parenting knowledge, literacy awareness and application, confidence, and social support, and a change in attitude to education and participation in education
- increase in community awareness and continued provision of services which complement other community services

There were no identified negative impacts, other than the "growing pains" that occur with the introduction of new program components into an organization.



Key themes/lessons

Four major lessons were learned by implementing TLC₃:

- continual improvement in the form of ongoing professional development, reflection, and modifications based on reflections, is essential to the success of a program
- a best practices approach, where practice is aligned with factors such as values, theories, beliefs, evidence and understanding of the environment, facilitates a program's all round effectiveness
- positive relationships are powerful and need to be nurtured
- change is not easy; there is a cycle of initial resistance, adaptation and acceptance.

Policy implications

There are three major policy implications resulting from the evaluation, all related to providing an environment which actively promotes healthy childhood development:

1. An environment supportive of early childhood learning requires the appropriate allocation of resources. Specifically, it is important to provide adequate and stable funding for ELC and other organizations doing high quality work.

2. Public policy needs to address the devastating impacts of poverty upon the lives of families with young children. Key informants pointed out, that ELC and other agencies individually cannot mitigate all the impacts of poverty upon children's development.

3. The ELC provides a program model that works extremely well in a Saskatchewan context. Some of the salient features of the ELC that could be considered by other agencies include:
- consistency between practice and factors such as values and evidence
 - continual improvement through ongoing reflection, evaluation and modification and through keeping abreast of current research in the field
 - positive relationships at all levels. This includes taking direction from, being sensitive to, and being supportive of the community the organization is mandated to serve (in ELC's case, the families who participate in its programs)
 - a strengths-based approach views children and families as full and active partners in learning and growing.



Conclusion

Evaluation findings were very positive. The major conclusion of this report is that TLC³ program components were directly and indirectly responsible for many benefits experienced by the children, parents and the community. ELC, by using an approach solidly based on continual improvement, alignment of practice with values and other important factors, and good relationships at all levels, has produced excellent results through its implementation of the TLC³ project.

These positive results have a number of implications for ELC, policy makers and the broader Saskatchewan community.

- **First**, they validate the work of ELC and suggest the importance of securing a more adequate funding base to allow the program to continue to deliver existing programs. Ideally funding should also provide ELC with future opportunities to continue to refine and expand upon its existing programs.
- **Second**, these results join a growing body of information that documents the effectiveness of early childhood programs and provides an illustration of a program within a Saskatchewan context.
- **Third**, the evaluation report presents findings that have the potential to provide valuable guidance and insight to other programs working within a uniquely Saskatchewan context.



"Play is the child's
single most
beneficial activity
in the early
childhood
program."
Janet Gonzalez-
Mcua (1998)

