

University Child Care Centre EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The TLC³ Project at the University Child Care Centre (UCCC) at the University of Calgary (U of C) was the last site to receive funding from the Lawson Foundation to discover the kinds of programs that best “stimulate infants’ and young children’s capacity to think listen and communicate.” We were able to catch up to the other six sites fairly quickly thanks to the shared experiences of the other sites and our partnership with Calgary Family Connections Society whose experienced staff were available to deliver the programs we had selected.

Program Description

We began the TLC³ program offering three programs which we felt would best complement the child care program while meeting the goals of the project to enhance children’s language and cognition. We chose two pre-existing programs, *Parent Child Mother Goose (PCMG)* and *Parents As Teachers (PAT)*, and partnered with a community agency called Calgary Family Connections Society to deliver them on site. The *Toy and Resource Lending Library* that we developed with a graduate student at U of C was enhanced by information sheets on the value of play and appropriate use of the materials in the library called *Tips and Quips*.

By the end of our third year we had added several more programs that we believed fit the goals of the TLC³ project and the philosophy and approach of the day care to include four and five year old children. *Child As Scientist* is a preschool science program that aims to augment children’s knowledge of various topics in biology, thereby also increasing the children’s global understanding, reasoning, and theory development in the domain of biology. *Story Crafting* is a developmentally-based storytelling program designed to improve the storytelling skills of kindergarten children to a greater extent than procedures typically used in high-level child care kindergarten classes.

Evaluation and Evaluation Findings

a. Our evaluation plan was focused on measuring the overall effects of the various programs. As different children participated in different programs throughout the duration of our TLC³ programming, it was necessary to develop measures that reflected the goals of the individual programs. Thus, our evaluation plan involved several components including:

- Evaluation of children’s language development (PCMG 00-01 only)
- Evaluation of parent satisfaction with programming (PCMG, PAT)
- Evaluation of parents’ use of songs and rhymes at home (using journals: Saturday PCMG program only)
- Evaluation of Knowing and Growing Together lecture series
- Evaluation of use of toy lending library and resource library
- Evaluation of children’s scientific knowledge (CASP program)

- Evaluation of story-crafting program

b. We used the following measures in the evaluation of our different programs:

Parent-Child Mother Goose Program

Quantitative Measures:

- Preschool Language Evaluation Scale-3
- *MacArthur Communicative Development Inventories*

Qualitative Measures:

- Parent evaluations, which involved a simple questionnaire parents filled out at the end of each 10 week session
- Process notes, which were notes taken by the facilitator at each PCMG meeting;
- Videotape which included video of the children participating as well as comments from parents

Parents as Teachers

- Parent Evaluations

Toy lending library and resource library

- Usage statistics
- Parent Feedback Evaluation Form

Knowing and Growing Together Lecture Series

- Participant evaluation form

Child as Scientist

- Protocol analysis (see scoring scheme in "outcomes" description)
- Statistical analysis

Story Crafting

- Protocol analysis (see scoring scheme in "outcomes" description)
- Statistical analysis

Key Findings

Parent-Child Mother Goose

PCMG was successful in attaining several of its intended goals. It was an enjoyable experience that gave pleasure to the both the parents and children involved. Many of the program goals were met. As mentioned earlier, learning of language skills, one of the benefits intended by the PCMG program was not mentioned as frequently as some other themes, which address PCMG goals. This may be indicative of the fact that this group, given their demographic advantages, may already have the skills to provide appropriate learning environments for their children. Nevertheless, taken as a whole,

the theme of learning was still a notable one, indicating that regardless of demographics, all parents and children may benefit from programs such as PCMG.

In addition to language skills, parents also indicated that PCMG promoted interactive play in their child. Parents found it rewarding to observe their children learning, interacting and participating. Parents were pleased to see how stimulating their children through PCMG had resulted in language, interactive and social skills.

Parents indicated that their own interaction with other parents and their children's interaction with other children were valuable aspects of PCMG. However, by far the most important form of interaction indicated by parents was that of the parent interacting with their own child on a weekday. Interestingly, this was not a specific goal of the program. As mentioned in the analysis, this finding may be due to the nature of the parent's work. These participants are professionals and students at the University who may not get many opportunities to spend time with their child during the weekday. Thus, PCMG provides them with the time for parent and child to enjoy being together during the week.

Knowing and Growing Together Series

This type of lecture series is an effective tool for disseminating information to parents and caregivers. Participants found the content of the lectures relevant and helpful.

Toy Lending Library and Resource Library

Both on-site and outreach parents who used the Libraries felt that this program was an excellent resource and would like to see them grow.

Story Crafting Program

- The Story Crafting Program was successful in advancing the structural complexity of children's orally generated stories.
- Specifically, Experimental group participants out-performed their Comparison group counterparts in generating a solution to the problems they articulated in their stories, thus moving closer to the culturally derived form of the Western folktale.
- Although there were considerable differences between the two groups on two other measures, namely, the use of the adversative conjunctions, but and so, and the number of mental states included in the stories, these did not reach significance because of the large variability within each group and the small number of participants.
- On several measures, both groups reached a high level of performance, suggesting that both instruction programs were effective in supporting participants' oral story telling.
- Notably, however, the Comparison group did not out-perform the Experimental group on any measure.

Child as Scientist: Beginning Biology Program

- Preschool children are interested in biological science.
- A biological science program can be adapted into regular preschool/daycare activities.
- Although difficulties emerge when instruction is married with research, research helps help to inform program design.
- It is essential that assessment measures directly address instructed content. In the present project the assessment measure for the Growth and Life Properties Units, in particular, did not appear to fit with the instruction.
- Language demands of assessment tools must be taken into consideration when designing assessment tools.
- Pre-school instruction benefits from a balanced combination of direct, developmentally-appropriate instruction and fun, hands-on activities.

Themes

Dr. Anne McKeough and Dr. Susan Graham sat on the Steering Committee for the project and were responsible for evaluating the various programs. Working as we did with children whose parents were typically well-educated and who had middle to higher incomes, we were not expecting to see dramatic differences in the children's language and cognitive skills. This proved to be true, however, the themes that did emerge from the final evaluation of the UCCC TLC³ Project include:

- Theory and research serve as a strong base for the development of preschool instructional programs.
- Developmentally-based and interactive instructional programs are effective in enhancing preschoolers' language and cognitive development.
- Enhancing parents' awareness of their children's developmental capacities leads parents to adapt their parenting style and expectations to meet their child's needs.
- Effective programming needs to be contextualized within a sensitive social environment.

Overall Impact

Our overall impression of the impact TLC³ has had on the children, families and staff at the UCCC is one of success. Children have benefited from the extra time they have spent with their parents, the enhanced programs and the improved skills of their caregivers. Parents have learned ways to enhance their child's development, while enjoying a pleasurable activity and making new friends. The staff have had the benefits of increased professional development, mentoring and the rejuvenating effect of participating in an innovative national project. The community has benefited as well. Through our lecture series and two programs' involvement in our evaluation research

we shared the resources of the TLC³ project. All who participated in TLC³ have gained from the experience, including the centre itself which is now better resourced than it was four years ago.

Many parents have reported that they sing to their children more and use the things they learned from PCMG to manage and ease transitions and routines with their children. They also comment on how pleased they are to be doing something with their children during their work week. Parents who met each other while participating in PCMG socialize more than we had seen in the past, both at the centre and away from the centre.

Although UCCC has long enjoyed a reputation as a quality child care program it was not necessarily seen as a resource for the child care community. Now, other child care programs in the Calgary region look to UCCC for ideas on programming and especially for help on developing lending libraries and parenting programs.

The history between the child care centre and the university has not always been one of noticeable collaboration or cooperation. The TLC³ project contributed to a higher profile for the child care centre on campus over the last few years. Although the centre was designed with research in mind, very little research has happened there until TLC³. The participation of Drs. McKeough and Graham and their students has established a precedent that we expect will continue in the years to come.

Sustainability

We view sustainability as our ability to continue to provide the programs we developed or delivered during the TLC³ project. We feel fortunate that the Toy and Resource Lending Libraries, Child As Scientist, and Story Crafting and PCMG will, in some fashion, carry on after the funding ends. The staff have integrated many of the things they learned over the course of the project into their daily practice and the centre is now well-resourced to continue to enhance children's language and cognitive development.

In addition, several things have happened to help sustain these programs. We have the materials that were developed for **Child As Scientist** and have also received funding from the NCE CLLR-net to continue this project. The **Story Crafting** kit is in the centre and the staff are now familiar with how to implement this program. Over the course of the project we stocked the libraries with toys, equipment and resources which will last for many years. Parents have demonstrated their commitment and interest in this project aspect by bringing in and donating toys and materials and they plan to fundraise to re-stock the "book corners" in each room.

We will neither continue with PAT nor will we have an outside person deliver the PCMG program at an additional cost to the child care centre. Most of our staff had the training and although many of those who took the training have moved on from the centre, we hope that one or more of those remaining will choose to take it on next year.

Interestingly, one or two parents are considering running the program themselves on site.

Collaboration and building on people's strengths will help us to sustain these programs into the future. We will continue to reach out to the university, our peers and the community to help us provide opportunities for our staff and parents to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Summary and Conclusions

The TLC³ Project at UCCC offered programs that have enhanced the children's development and provided enjoyable experiences at the same time. The programs that we delivered have increased the understanding and knowledge of the parents and staff. They are better able to provide opportunities that stimulate children's capacity to think listen and communicate. The children who were the first to participate are now "mentoring" the toddlers, sharing their love of reading and singing.

Our experience has reinforced the value of collaborating with others. Our relationship with the University of Calgary has been strengthened as a result of this project and we expect it will continue to contribute to an enriched program for the children, parents and staff of our centre. Faculty and students are more likely to share their theoretical knowledge and use the centre as a site for their research. Our partnership with Calgary Family Connections has connected us to the community in a new way through our shared professional development opportunities and activities. The two child care programs we partnered with for the TLC³ evaluation are now partners in another project funded through the federal/provincial Early Childhood Development Initiative. We are indeed richer as a result of these collaborations.

Our evaluation findings were not particularly a surprise. It was very difficult to tease out children's gains because, for the most part, they already received lots of stimulation and appropriate interactions and activities at home and at the child care centre. Nevertheless, one of the evaluation themes is that developmentally-based and interactive instructional programs are effective in enhancing preschoolers' language and cognitive development. The findings indicate that theory and research serve as a strong base for the development of preschool instructional programs. Finally, the evaluation results indicate that enhancing parents' awareness of their children's developmental capacities leads parents to adapt their parenting style and expectations to meet their child's needs.

The TLC³ project at UCCC has demonstrated what the funders and those involved with the project believed to be true from the start. That regardless of demographics, all parents and children may benefit from programs such as those offered during the past four years.