

The Learning Curve

Part II

The TLC3 Project at the Mid-Point

Summer, 2000

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1 A Maturing Project

Imagine you are in a field of butterflies. You have visited this field before when the butterflies were in their cocoons, busily transforming themselves from caterpillars into winged creatures. Now they are in mid-flight, exploring, spreading out across the sky... How can you catch their essence at this moment?

That is the challenge of *The Learning Curve, Part II*. We are trying to capture a five-year project at around its mid-point. Part I of *The Learning Curve* described the genesis and early development of the project known as TLC3. Now we are trying to crystallize what has been created and what has been learned at this interim stage.

Our challenge has been made more complex by the fact that this project is both national and local. Our butterflies are all different from one another. Some are at earlier stages of development than others, and each has taken on the unique colouring of its local community. But they are all headed in the same direction. They share the same internal compass.

- There is a shared commitment to support parents to help their children develop strong language and thinking skills in the critical early years of development.
- There is a shared commitment to ensure that this project reaches beyond those parents and children personally touched by TLC3 to have an impact in the wider community – parents, policy-makers, providers of programs, and professionals.
- There is a shared commitment to work to bridge the traditional gaps between practice and theory, between community and research.
- There is a shared commitment to evaluate what has been achieved, and to share what has been learned with any and all who are willing to pay attention.
- There is a shared commitment to try to sustain the programs, in some form, beyond the five-year lifespan of this project and its funding.

TLC3 stands for Thinking, Listening and Communicating, Tender Loving Care, and The Learning Centres, and for Tendresse, Lien et Communication, Tandem: Langage et Communication, et Theorie en Liaison avec la Communauté.

It is funded by The Lawson Foundation, based in London, Ontario, and it is managed by the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute in Toronto.

The initial version of *The Learning Curve* described the first year of program implementation up to the spring of 1998 and some tentative conclusions based on that early experience.

This second document takes us through to late 1999/early 2000. It is based on information and insights provided by the seven sites in their annual reports and during on-site interviews conducted by the national evaluation team from the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute. Hincks-Dellcrest has contributed to the content from its unique viewpoint as the national manager of TLC3. Some members of the National Advisory Committee who are involved with individual sites have also offered comments. The sharing of information and ideas at the TLC3 national symposium in the spring of 2000 also enriched this report.

When it comes to learning, it is impossible to draw a line to separate what people learned earlier as opposed to later. Some of the “findings” at this point simply reinforce what was learned in the early going. We are using this mid-term report to ensure that what is at top-of-mind now is recorded for future reference.

In the first version of *The Learning Curve*, we described TLC3 as a being a bit like a family – inspired by caring, focused on children, sustained by relationships, based in community, demanding commitment and hard work. That is all still true. And since the first year of implementation, we find that our family is maturing. The projects across the country have expanded their “reach” and consolidated their progress. A new site has been added. The evaluation framework has evolved.

The following sections document how TLC3 has changed nationally since the first year:

- the addition of a seventh site in Alberta;
- the evolution of the evaluation; and
- some of the more subtle “growth” that we believe has occurred.

Next, there are brief descriptions of what and how the original six sites are doing, and some of their achievements and challenges at this juncture. The sections are in alphabetical order, by title.

Finally, we explore some common themes and perhaps some uncommon ones in what we are learning. As with the original report of *The Learning Curve*, the conclusions discussed here are not set in stone. If we have learned anything in the course of this project, it is that the freedom to evolve and adapt and grow and learn is one of our greatest strengths.

2 A New Site in Alberta

The implementation plan that Hincks-Dellcrest developed at the beginning of this project included the option of adding a seventh site after the original six were up and running. The idea was to leave some flexibility so that another site could be chosen to fill in gaps in potential learning.

The first requirement for the new site was that it be in a different province from those already represented. Anne McKeough, a National Advisory Committee member from the University of Calgary, volunteered to do the legwork to identify some possible sites in Alberta.

According to Hincks-Dellcrest Executive Director Freda Martin, the new site had to meet the same basic criteria as the other sites:

- there had to be a high-quality organization or program already in operation in which TLC3 could be embedded;
- it needed to be well positioned to act as a community-wide resource to help other organizations and programs benefit through a “ripple effect” from TLC3.

There was another factor involved in the choice of the Alberta site. The managers of TLC3 and its funders, The Lawson Foundation, were interested in seeing the impact of TLC3 on a distinctly middle-income, well-educated group of parents. There is increasing evidence that there are parents in all income categories who need social support and advice on how to foster their children’s language and cognitive development in the early years.

The University Child Care Centre in Calgary met all the criteria. It is operated by a non-profit society primarily for the students, faculty and staff of the university. It has been in operation since 1976, and serves about 80 preschool children. The Centre provides a setting where research in early child development can be conducted, and it is well known in the community.

The Child Care Centre’s written proposal was submitted in February of 1999, a team from Calgary was able to attend the spring symposium, and the TLC3 project at the Centre started offering programs in September.

Like all the other sites at the outset, the board of the Child Care Centre found the offer of funding to join a national project almost unbelievable. The comment was: “In daycare, no one ever offers you anything.” Once they recovered from the shock, they were keen to move forward, and things seemed to fall readily into place. “The timing just seemed to be right for putting this group of people together,” said the Centre’s Executive Director Maria Valenti. “It was serendipity.”

In January 1999, Maria and Sandra Jones, the Program Director, attended a one-day workshop on the *Parent Child Mother Goose* program sponsored by the Calgary Family Connections Society. Calgary Family Connections operates a Family Resource Centre and offers *Parents as Teachers* (PAT), which is a home-visiting program that gives parents ideas and advice on fostering their child's early development.

Not only did they feel that the *Mother Goose* program would be a good enrichment of their own programming, the Centre decided to contract with Calgary Family Connections to offer the *Mother Goose* program at the University Child Care Centre and to deliver the PAT home visiting program. That way, the Centre would not be "reinventing the wheel", the programs would be in operation quickly, and the Centre's own staff could be trained when they expressed interest. As an additional benefit, Family Connections would receive matching grants equivalent to the TLC3 funding.

The partnership with Calgary Family Connections would also send a message to the community that this "wealth" from TLC3 was going to be shared with the community.

In addition, they knew a doctoral student at the university doing research on play-based learning who would be ideal to help set up a new toy and resource lending library. Shelley Bergman researched what other centres did, and surveyed parents for feedback. "I had never done this before so I wanted to make sure I was on the right track," she said. The library offers "tip sheets" for parents and staff, with tips and quotes based on research in early child development, and Shelley has written up the developmental benefits of each toy to help parents interact with their child as they play with the toy.

The Calgary site has started with a focus on babies and young toddlers up to 25 months of age. The TLC3 program components include:

- *Parent Child Mother Goose*
- *Parents as Teachers* (PAT)
- a toy and resource lending library
- enriched language programs in the playrooms of the centre
- staff training.

The plan is to move into programming for two, three and four-year-old children in the second and third years, and reach out to other child care programs and family support services in Calgary and to families who attend or work at the university but do not use the child care program.

The team from the Centre who wrote the proposal said they learned a lot from doing it. The learning is continuing through the early implementation phase. What are some things they have found out?

- You need a strong team of people who share the same vision, values, but who are able to work independently. If you know where you want to end up, you will eventually find the right tools to get there.
- You have to be prepared to adapt the scheduling of programming to the routines of parents and children. Flexibility is key. Both *Mother Goose* and the *PAT* program have had schedule changes.
- Communications with parents is vital. This group of parents is not shy about expressing any concerns they have.
- Staff require some TLC too. In this context, the facilitator from Family Connections spent time with staff to explain the program. The Centre had to adjust use of space and the children's routines.

Anne McKeough, who is now on the Steering Committee for this TLC3 project, feels that the Calgary site has had “the benefit of some history” with the other six sites. “I think there were fewer challenges with the startup phase here.”

Anne is busy coming up with ideas for ways to reach outwards, including a lecture series and a collaboration with a specialist in children's literature. Another new collaborator is Susan Graham, a professor from the Department of Psychology, who is interested in the emergence of scientific reasoning in children. Susan is a member of the TLC3 steering committee. Anne is also seeking a researcher to study the relationships among staff, parents, administrators and researchers.

This site was chosen to look at the impact on middle-income, well-educated parents. The TLC3 team is already noticing a difference. Parents are getting to know each other more because they participate together in *Parent Child Mother Goose*. Some have become involved in helping with the library. Brenda Sauvé, who does the home visiting as well as *Mother Goose*, says these parents, like most others, are “hungry for information about their children's development – they have lots of questions”.

TLC3 also seems to be having an impact on parents' own playfulness around their young children. “One parent said she doesn't feel silly bursting into song anymore,” said Maria.

3 Evolving An Evaluation

Evaluation is a core part of TLC3. The Lawson Foundation made it clear from the start that it didn't want to fund a research project; it wanted to fund programs that helped parents and children where they live. But the Foundation was equally determined that at the end of this project, TLC3 should have some "outcomes" to show for itself.

A major goal of the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute was to give the sites experience with evaluation so that they could see a benefit for themselves in thinking systematically about what the outcomes of their programs should be and in being able to demonstrate that those outcomes were achieved. No one doubts that good things are happening for families at the project sites. The question that has been something of a struggle to answer is how to measure those good things.

The design, development and piloting of the site-specific evaluations is a major achievement for TLC3 at this mid-point.

To go back a little, the original plan was that there would be a national evaluation design, developed by Hincks-Dellcrest Institute collaboratively with the sites, with a common protocol applied to all sites across the country. That plan was dropped relatively early, before the end of the first year of implementation, when Hincks-Dellcrest saw how diverse the site projects were. Not only were the communities quite different, but the programs were different and the sites were working with different groups of young children (infants, young toddlers, preschoolers).

The plan for a common protocol for all sites was abandoned early, but not without some regret. "It would have been great to have it, but it was simply not feasible," said Director of Research Nancy Cohen. "It is important to remind ourselves that the goal of this project is not research."

The university research model tends to be very purist, requiring the gathering of quantitative data and the use of control groups for comparison. "At the community level, it is very difficult to achieve that level of rigour," she said. "There is a movement, particularly in the U.S., to encourage funding for qualitative, community-based research that involves partnerships between community programs and universities. Both partners must respect and value the others' contributions, values and goals."

For TLC3, an evaluation framework was developed that includes a site-specific evaluation, developed by the site project teams themselves, and a cross-site evaluation that involves collection of some common data from all sites and a participatory process at the end of the project to draw out themes and key learnings.

Site-Specific Evaluation

The plan for a site-specific evaluation put the onus on the local sites to design and begin gathering information for an evaluation that suits their specific programs and their community and organizational context. In most cases, the sites took the initiative in “pairing up” with a local university researcher or an evaluation consultant, in some instances a member of the TLC3 National Advisory Committee. Most TLC3 sites have formed an evaluation committee or advisory group.

The Hincks-Dellcrest evaluation team, lead by Nancy Cohen, has been available to provide advice. Evaluation Coordinator Jane Hoffmeyer has been in touch with the sites by e-mail and telephone on a regular basis.

At the 1998 Symposium, the site teams began to work on drafting a logic model that led them through a thinking process about what they were trying to achieve – with the children, the parents, the community – and what indicators would tell them whether they were successful. The site evaluations have come a long way since then. The *Summary of Site Specific Outcome Instruments as of Fall of 1999* on the next page gives a sense of the progress that has been made and the different approaches that are being taken.

It hasn't been easy. Designing an evaluation has been new territory for many, if not most, of the key players at the sites. When they joined TLC3, their strengths were mainly in delivering community-based services – teaching young children, working with parents, and administering organizations that provide services.

During the annual site visits that Nancy and Jane made, there were references at several sites to the evaluation challenge. There was a sense that Hincks-Dellcrest standards would be high, but no one knew exactly what that meant. Sites weren't sure whether their plans would measure up. The same anxiety prevailed earlier in the development of TLC3 when it came to program implementation. In both instances, with programming and evaluation, the teams at the sites worked extra hard to live up to a generalized and self-imposed expectation of excellence.

“I know the sites really struggled with the evaluation,” said Nancy Cohen. “But I keep telling them you wouldn't have learned nearly as much if we had done it for you. If we had handed you a battery of tests to apply, you would have used what we gave you for this project, and you probably wouldn't have used it again. This way, you have something that you developed yourselves and it will stay with you.”

Summary of Site Specific Outcome Instruments as of Fall 1999

SITE	INSTRUMENTS (italics indicates a pre-existing instrument)
Vancouver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance and exit Interviews with parents (variables not covered within MIS) • <i>Communicative & Symbolic Behavior Scale (CSBS) B Infant/Toddler Checklist for Communication and Language Development</i> • <i>Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales: Parent Self-report</i> OR <i>CSBS Developmental Profile</i> • Language samples from variety of stimuli (e.g. story telling, with photo album, play event, bookshare) • Parent-Child journal (documenting use of story telling, lullabies, songs & rhymes over a one week period) • Staff evaluations (staff self-assessments and evaluations of the program) • Parent-Child Mother Goose group process checklist • Childcare setting feedback (instrument under development)
Calgary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Preschool Language Scale -3</i> • <i>MacArthur Communicative Development Inventories</i> • Facilitator/parent educator observations (Parents As Teachers= Personal Visit Record, journal to document anecdotes from parents) • <i>Diagnostic Inventory for Screening Children - Preschool Screen Version 3.0</i> • Parent observations of child-s development (esp. use of language and play) • Parent evaluation of service delivery and parent self-assessments (<i>questionnaires developed by Parents As Teachers, Inc. and Parent-Child Mother Goose</i>) • <i>Parent Poll (Invest In Kids Foundation, 1999)</i>
Meadow Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Early Screening Profiles</i> • <i>Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test B Revised (PPVT-R)</i> • Hearing Test • Program facilitators observations (checklists and observation sheets) • Parent journals
Regina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Preschool Evaluation Scale</i> • Analysis of videotapes (classroom activities) and child portfolios • Teacher-s anecdotal records and observational checklist • Parent reports (interviews, feedback forms, and surveys)
Toronto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Home Observation of Measurement of the Environment (HOME)</i> • <i>Parenting Stress Index (PSI)</i> • <i>Diagnostic Inventory for Screening Children (DISC)</i> • <i>Kohn Social Competence Scale</i> • Semi-structured interview for childcare workers
St. Remi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal de lecture parent-enfants (Parent-Child Journal); Journal de lecture adults-enfants (for caregivers) • <i>Échelle de tonalité affective</i> (Affective Tone Scale for Child) • <i>Bayley Scales of Infant Development - specifically the Mental Development Index (MDI) and Behavior Rating Scale (BRS) and language items</i> OR <i>Stanford-Binet</i> (for older children)
Dartmouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator observations • Parent questionnaires B personal knowledge and/or skill development • Family journal (documenting daily use of songs and books: magnitude and duration) • <i>Rossetti Infant-Toddler Language Scale, Rossetti Communication Report</i> • Measures of teacher-child language interactions (<i>MLU, Scaled Judgments</i>) • Staff journal (preschool setting) • Observational checklist (preschool setting, instrument under development)

Cross-Site Evaluation

There are three parts to the cross-site evaluation:

- program monitoring;
- a Management Information System; and
- a cluster evaluation.

Program monitoring involves the collection of qualitative information from semi-structured interviews conducted during annual site visits by Hincks-Dellcrest. The interviews gather information on the thematic basis from year to year. For example, at the beginning, the sites were asked about the process they went through to get their programs off the ground. At the mid-point, the focus is more on the design of the site-specific evaluation, program implementation issues, including communications with parents and other community members, and plans to sustain TLC3 when its five-year funding ends.

In the fourth and fifth years of the project, the Hincks-Dellcrest evaluation team is also planning to interview key informants within the community. These may be parents and other community members, service providers, program planners, and policy-makers in municipal and provincial governments.

The sites also provide annual reports to Hincks-Dellcrest as part of the program monitoring component of the evaluation.

The Management Information System (MIS), with computerized data entry, was designed by the Hincks-Dellcrest evaluation team. The MIS is used to collect demographic information on the families and information on the children's health and development. This information on families is collected once at program entry. Hincks-Dellcrest also prepared an interviewer guide for use of the MIS, hired a national project data manager (Jean Cooper), and brought staff from the sites to Toronto to be trained in implementing the MIS.

Optimally the third part of the cross-site evaluation is a cluster evaluation. The cluster evaluation concept was developed by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in the U.S. It involves using a group participatory process to integrate and synthesize the findings and experiences of multiple sites that are operating in different ways in different contexts and that share a common purpose – which fits TLC3.

In our case, the plan is to gather together information from the sites to enable us to synthesize themes and key learnings from across the country. The sites, Hincks-Dellcrest, and the national advisors will all be involved in the generalizing of the learning outcomes. While the process can begin to happen while the sites are still implementing their programs – and some preliminary brainstorming was done at the 2000 Symposium – the main work on the cluster evaluation will occur after the programs have completed their five-year mandate. Hincks Dellcrest is currently seeking additional funding from the Lawson Foundation to complete this final phase.

The cluster evaluation will take the information that has been gathered through activities such as data collection and analysis, site visits, and networking conferences, and use it to help identify common themes regarding the facilitation of early language and cognitive development in the context of important early relationships.

In turn, the results of the cluster evaluation will be integral to developing a TLC3 communications plan once the project is completed. That plan will focus on what we have learned through this project that others should know about.

TLC3 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Site-specific Evaluation

- designed by each site to test their unique logic model

Cross-site Evaluation

Program Monitoring

- implementation and process interviews
- key informant interviews
- annual reports

Management Information System

- demographics
- child health and development
- parent-child language and literacy activities

Cluster Evaluation

- collaboration across sites and with the Institute to analyze and synthesize findings related to the TLC3 goals

The process of beginning to identify what has been learned was a key focus of the 2000 symposium.

At the symposium, a team member from each site participated in four small group sessions. A member of the National Advisory Committee participated in each group as well. Each group was assigned one of the inputs listed below:

1. Site organizations and staff have evolved over time to meet various challenges associated with adopting the TLC3 program.
2. Sites have involved their communities in TLC3 program planning.
3. Sites have discovered that it is necessary to adopt and adapt intervention strategies to suit the needs of particular populations and communities they serve.
4. Sites have found that serving families with the highest needs is the most challenging, and often exceeds their capacities, even with making accommodations.

The groups discussed these inputs (What have the sites done?) in light of one or all of the following outputs (What difference did it make?):

1. Sites have discovered that an intermediary outcome of adapting to TLC3 programming is the growing capacity of staff to intervene successfully with communities, parents and children in promoting early childhood cognition and learning.
2. Parents tend to be empowered by being involved as volunteers and/or facilitators and by participating in site advisory committees (or boards of directors).
3. Parents have reported and sites have observed improved parenting skills and positive language and cognitive changes in their children.

The discussion at the 2000 symposium focused on testing these statements for validity and sharing the experiences of each site to enrich shared understanding. Generally, the consensus seemed to be that these were statements in which every site could “see” themselves – evolving and involving.

Some groups revised the wording to what they felt more clearly reflected the TLC3 experience. For example, in relation to input #1, the group decided it was more accurate to say that sites “adapted programming” rather than “adopted the TLC3 program” because there was no single, defined program that everyone adopted.

In relation to output #2, a comment from one group was that the concept of “building on parental capacity” is preferable to “empowerment” because it focuses more on what parents bring than on what they receive.

Characteristically, the site participants often portrayed what is happening in organic terms. One such image was that of a bouquet of flowers to describe how sites have endeavoured to serve families with high and diverse needs. In order not to exceed the sites' capacity, they branch out and link to other services in the community (the flowers) from which parents can choose the services they need.

As for sites' involvement in community, there was discussion of what community is. All sites have involved parents, and have reached out to the local neighbourhood and beyond. One suggested image was of concentric circles, with the child at the centre, surrounded by the family, the local community, and the broader community (government, institutions, agencies etc.) They all make up a continuum of community involvement.

It was pointed out that all the TLC3 programs are involved in a maturing process. They are building on the strengths of parents and staff, and are driven by the dynamics of the community.

The process of generalizing findings across sites is just gaining momentum. But there is growing confidence that the cluster evaluation approach is going to bear fruit. "The whole program is greater than the sum of its parts," is the way symposium facilitator Lance Buhl put it.

What will TLC3 be able to tell policy-makers and communities?

Potentially, quite a lot.

4 Growing Stronger

TLC3 is growing stronger. It is coming together more as a national project. We have tried to identify some of the ways in which we think it has matured since the first year of implementation.

Relationships are more solid. Trust and openness have increased.

Relationships have been strengthened through shared experience and learning and the time to get to know one another.

Manager-Site Relationship

There is an openness among the sites about discussing the difficulties their programs have faced, as well as their achievements. There does not seem to be any effort made to whitewash problems for the benefit of the national managers. The site teams seem comfortable with the annual visits that are made by Nancy Cohen and Jane Hoffmeyer. The evaluation team, for its part, engages in a give-and-take dialogue. The sites are invited to tell Hincks-Dellcrest what improvements it could make to assist the sites better.

The continuing anomaly in the manager-site relationship is the one between the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute and the Ontario site of TLC3. The Growing Together site in Toronto, in which TLC3 is embedded, is a project of the Hincks-Dellcrest Treatment Centre (in collaboration with the Toronto Public Health Department). The Hincks-Dellcrest Institute is a sister organization which does education and research and provides community resources. As such, Hincks-Dellcrest has a closer tie-in to what goes on at Growing Together than to the organizations at other sites. The Institute has tried to walk a fine line, separating its role as the national manager of TLC3 from other aspects of its relationship with Growing Together.

Site-to-Site Relationship

The site-to-site attachment, both emotional and practical, is “scaffolded” by the symposium held every year just outside of Toronto when people meet in person for two days of concentrated work – information sharing, small group problem-solving and educational presentations – and some fun. There has been some important cross-site exchange of ideas and sharing of information and materials during the symposium or soon afterwards. For example, the team from Vancouver gave credit at the 2000 symposium to the team from Québec for giving them the inspiration to develop a parent journal. The journal uses pictures and a calendar of activities to encourage parents to keep track of when they use rhymes and song and read and tell stories with their young children.

As the site teams shared ideas and told the others what they had been doing over the past year, a list of resources that could be shared was drawn up. For example, the Calgary team had developed some “research tips and quotes” and an annotated list of toys explaining how they supported a child’s development.

Ongoing communication throughout the year among the sites has not been common. The sites can link with each other through electronic mail but once they get back into their busy routines, there has not been a whole lot of cross-site communication. That may evolve in 2000, however, with the launch of the TLC3 website. The website, created and managed by data manager Jean Cooper at Hincks-Dellcrest, is intended to strengthen communications among the sites, and facilitate the circulation of information to the sites from Hincks-Dellcrest. The website is also a way to communicate with the public about the TLC3 project and about early child development. It has links to other sites with child development resources.

An electronic bulletin board, which is only accessible by password, will allow the sites, Hincks-Dellcrest and members of the National Advisory Committee, to post questions, comments, resources and other information.

One perhaps unexpected way in which the sites learn about each other is through Nancy Cohen, who reinforces the feeling of common experience during the annual site visits. When someone says we couldn’t believe how long this took or how great that was, she often relates the experience to similar circumstances at another site, or passes along how another site may have dealt with a challenge in a unique way.

Manager-Funder Relationship

The relationship between the manager and the funder has never been arm’s length in this project. The Foundation consciously took a proactive stance from the beginning. The President and the Executive Director of The Lawson Foundation both attend the symposium each year to hear first-hand from the sites about what and how they are doing. The Executive Director liaises with the team at the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute on a regular basis during the year. The Foundation is using what it is learning through TLC3 to influence its approach to granting. As both Hincks-Dellcrest and The Lawson Foundation gain experience with TLC3, there is a deepening sense of co-ownership.

Relationship of Advisors to Sites

Different members of the National Advisory Committee have played different roles in supporting TLC3, in keeping with their particular skills and interests.

Some members are much closer to the day-to-day workings of the TLC3 sites than others. Advisors have made important contributions to program development, evaluation and other decision-making at the sites in Nova Scotia, Québec and Alberta.

The whole National Advisory Committee meets the site teams once a year at the annual symposium. Members have said that their appreciation of the challenges and strengths of community service organizations has increased as they have come to know the people from these projects better every year. At the annual get-together, some of the advisors who have expertise in particular fields of research or public policy development or communications have prepared and presented sessions on areas of learning that were suggested by the sites or by the committee.

Hincks-Dellcrest consults with the national advisors individually or as a group, as needed.

The sites are more independent.

There was a lot of anxiety in the field in the early going about what the manager (Hincks-Dellcrest) and funder (Lawson) of TLC3 wanted. That feeling is much reduced. The sites remain accountable to their national manager and funder, and provide annual reports and budgets, but they make their own decisions about how their programs operate, and how they will build partnerships in the community.

Their independence and sense of ownership is perhaps best illustrated by the way critical challenges have been handled. In Dartmouth, the site withdrew from one community partnership and entered into another one. Similarly, in Vancouver, the site found a new partner to assist with the evaluation.

“They didn’t tell us they had a problem and ask what we thought they should do. They told us what they were doing to fix it. That speaks to their ownership of the project,” said Freda Martin. “The more ownership they feel, the harder they work, the more their creativity develops, and they go way beyond anything we would dream of asking them to do.”

The evaluation is the one area where most site teams tended to feel less confident. But, as we have already discussed, that hurdle seems to have been overcome. There may still be implementation difficulties, but the sites are in a position to handle them.

The national project is more focused.

The Lawson Foundation has identified the transfer of knowledge as the primary goal of its \$5-million, five-year investment in TLC3.

Bridging the traditional gaps between and among researchers and community-based service providers and policy-makers was a goal of TLC3 from the outset. So was communicating what was learned from the national project. But it has taken some time to define and refine the concept of the transfer of knowledge.

Hincks-Dellcrest sought the advice of Carol Russell, a member of the TLC3 National Advisory Committee, and Executive Vice-President with the Invest in Kids Foundation. Invest in Kids conducted a review of research on early intervention programs, which found that creation of new knowledge about what works costs millions of dollars and takes a long time to “prove” the outcomes.

TLC3 had neither the time nor the research budget to attempt to make creation of new knowledge its primary focus. Instead, Hincks-Dellcrest recommended and The Lawson Foundation agreed that this project should concentrate on:

- making sure the sites are delivering innovative programs and that the results are as expected (i.e. good things are happening for children’s language and cognitive development and for their parents);
- transferring knowledge from what has been learned from “hard” research about supporting learning in the early years of child development into community practice; and
- developing evaluation and communications activities that focus on the process of development and implementation of the program to help others who want to develop programs of their own.

There is growing interest in TLC3.

TLC3 is getting better known and not just in the local neighbourhoods where programs are being offered to families. Some of the many routes through which word has spread include:

- speeches and other presentations;
- official ceremonies to launch TLC3 projects;
- professional associations of the coordinators and staff of TLC3;
- National Advisory Committee;
- local advisory committee members;
- training of people from other geographic areas;
- training of people from other sectors (e.g. public health or education);
- contacts with governments;
- contact with other funders e.g. private foundations, the United Way
- stories in the media;
- personal conversations.

At the 1999 symposium, a communications plan was presented and the site teams took home a communications template to adapt to local needs. TLC3 has a slogan – “Developing minds for the 21st century”. A bright yellow brochure which gives basic information on the project in a readable form has been developed and supplied to the sites.

The sites are tailoring their communications strategies to their own context and programs. Dartmouth hosted a breakfast forum to bring key local players, like the schools and the United Way, together to learn more about each other and build bridges. Vancouver has developed a form to register every contact that is made, where, and by whom. All sites are tracking their results and submitting them in their annual reports.

Sustainability has emerged as the key issue.

This may not sound like an indication of growth, but we think it is. Quite naturally, most of the energy of the site teams went initially into getting quality programs off the ground. Then there was the evaluation to put in place. Now all the sites are turning their attention to ways to keep programs operating in the community and to disperse the knowledge beyond their own organizations. They are not waiting until the final year to do something. They are not waiting for somebody to do it for them. This issue is explored further in Section 11 under Key Themes.

The sections that follow, Sections 5 through 10, try to give a sense of the original six TLC3 sites at the mid-point in this experience.

5 Adapting in Dartmouth

There is an image that comes to mind when you hear how things are going in the TLC3 project in the old harbour community of Dartmouth – a little ship that just keeps riding those waves of change, refusing to be pushed off course by choppy waters that might have swamped a less determined crew.

There have been some significant mid-term adjustments for TLC3 and its “host” organization, the Dartmouth Family Resource Centre. Most significant for TLC3 was the ending of a partnership with the Dartmouth Preschool, and the beginning of a new partnership with the Boys and Girls Club. The reason for the shift was characterized generally as a difference of philosophy. The TLC3 goals of promoting early language and thinking skills and supporting parent-child communication didn’t seem to be taking hold at the preschool. Both partners agreed to go their own ways.

Fortunately, the Family Resource Centre had already opened a dialogue with the Boys and Girls Club about sharing some of the time and expertise of TLC3 coordinator Natalie Downey. The Club was a logical choice for a new site for TLC3. The Family Resource Centre now has an agreement with the Club to provide core funding, training, consultation and evaluation services to their preschool program.

The Boys and Girls Club has been helping families and children for more than 20 years in North Dartmouth, which is a high-density, low-income district of the regional municipality of Halifax. The Club already had a preschool program, but the partnership with the Family Resource Centre meant some major changes. New staff had to be hired, with higher qualifications. The Club had to agree to drop its monthly fee for the preschool.

The board of the Club felt somewhat overwhelmed and it had misgivings at first (if we lose the fees, what happens when TLC3 funding runs out?), but it has come on-side. The transition seems to have gone smoothly, and everyone is enthusiastic about the new program. But it is a starting-over. Natalie has had to “start from scratch” training a new group of preschool staff. She is using the Hanen program, *Involving Teachers as Language Facilitators*.

While all this was going on, the TLC3 programming has continued through the Family Resource Centre. The ongoing components of the project include the following:

- Child development staff at the Family Resource Centre have been trained in *Learning Language and Loving It* and are given follow-up workshops and provided with informal support by the TLC3 coordinator.
- Parent-n-Tot Infant and Parent-n-Tot Toddler programs help family communication and relationship skills. Parents and children learn songs, rhymes and stories.
- *Baby Talk* for babies up to six months and their parents encourages the sharing of new parenting experiences and learning about baby's communication cues and how to respond.
- *You Make the Difference* helps parents recognize how much they can help their children with communication skills and learning through everyday conversation.

Dartmouth TLC3 has also shown its adaptability in its approach to programming. For example, the *Baby Talk* program is based on the clinical framework of *Keys to Caregiving* of the Nursing Child Assessment Training Institute. *Baby Talk* has attracted the interest of the Dalhousie School of Nursing to see how a clinically-based program has been transformed into a community-based program.

For the Dartmouth Family Resource Centre, the partnership with the Boys and Girls Club has extended its programming into another neighbourhood in the same district, which has brought in more families. In addition, the Family Resource Centre merged in 1999 with Wentworth Parent Resource Centre in downtown Dartmouth so that it now has another new partner and a new site.

The Family Resource Centre is becoming a major "hub" of activity for parents and young children. It started in 1994 with funding from Health Canada (Community Action Program for Children or CAPC), which continues to be its core funder. It has now entered into partnership with the Invest in Kids Foundation and a number of provincial government ministries, local health facilities and others to launch a major early intervention/prevention program.

Parent involvement is a keystone of the Family Resource Centre, and TLC3 is helping to extend and enrich that involvement. Parents from the community have been trained to co-facilitate programs such as *Baby Talk* and *Parent-n-Tot*. A community leader is being trained to lead *You Make the Difference*.

Natalie has found that parents are eager for any information and support you can give them to help their children. They appreciate the social supports from other parents as well as the new knowledge they get through the TLC3 programs.

News about TLC3 has spread beyond North Dartmouth. Natalie gives speeches to community and professional organizations and child care staff training sessions. There was a major public “launch” event for TLC3 in December, 1998, covered by local cable, and a TLC3 Parent-n-Tot Toddler program was featured in the press during National Family Literacy Day in 1999.

Betty Ann Chennell of the provincial Department of Community Services, who has been involved with TLC3 from the beginning and has served as chair of its Advisory Committee, sat in on the Parent-n-Tot facilitator training and has gone on to develop a package for her staff who conduct home visits so they can encourage parents’ use of songs and rhymes.

In the professional community, graduate students in speech-language pathology and nursing have done placements with TLC3. Mandy Kay-Raining Bird, who is with the faculty of the Dalhousie University School of Human Communication Disorders, sits on the local TLC3 Advisory Committee as well as the TLC3 National Advisory Committee. Mandy has collaborated with Jean Hughes to integrate language and communications into a Strengthening Family Capacities program for TLC3. Mandy is also guest-editing a special issue on prevention for the scholarly journal of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists.

One of the prices of success in Dartmouth is the number of agencies and organizations that are providing funding and that want to evaluate outcomes (e.g. Health Canada’s CAP-C program, Invest in Kids Foundation, TLC3). One of the complications of partnerships is that it is more difficult to attribute outcomes to a particular program or funding source. On the positive side, the Boys and Girls Club believes that evaluations such as that planned by TLC3 will help the organization in its relationship with funding organizations like the United Way.

One of the key lessons at this mid-point from Dartmouth’s point of view is confronting problems. “You have to confront problems you are experiencing in implementing a program. Sometimes there is too much of a mismatch to overcome,” said Mandy. “We went through a long period trying to make something work that didn’t work as well as we wanted it to. The challenge is knowing when to give up pressing your ideas and take a new direction.”

Natalie suggested: “You have to share some common philosophies or underlying principles with partners and then you can evolve together. If you don’t have that shared understanding, you can talk it to death and never get anywhere. And when it comes to making changes, the bottom line is what is best for the families, for the community – not for the project or the programs.”

6 Building a Partnership in Saint-Rémi

The TLC3 project in Saint-Rémi is a partnership between a small rural community south of the St. Lawrence River and the University of Québec at Montréal. This partnership is both Saint-Rémi's greatest strength and its greatest challenge.

The university's Laboratory of Infant Studies has developed an innovative program to promote language development and reading among children up to age five, with the help of their parents and other caregivers. It is called the ALI program, for *Activités de Lecture Interactive* (interactive reading activities).

There is ALI-Bébé for babies up to 15 months, ALI-Bambin for toddlers 15 to 36 months, and ALI-Explorateur for three and four-year-olds. ALI-DAC detects difficulties in cognitive and language development and proposes corrective activities. ALI-community action offers training to people working with young children so they can integrate ALI activities into their actions. ALI provides books for different ages of children, for use by families and organizations.

The university team has developed the various parts of the ALI program. It also sends students of the university to St. Rémi to be trainers and evaluators. The local partners include parents, grandparents and other caregivers of young children, and organizations that offer programs to young children in Saint-Rémi, such as the library, nursery or child care centres, and the health and social service agency (CLSC). The school board is also a partner; the ALI project does a profile of kindergarten children, in cooperation with the school system.

The ALI program is offered to families in their homes and to educators in the child care centre and kindergartens. The ALI books help children link pictures and words and tell their own stories. Parents and educators are given instructions and a guidebook. "Illiterate people are afraid of books. But even illiterate parents can easily apply the program if they are well coached," said librarian Nathalie Groulx.

The library may be one of the keys to the ongoing success of ALI. The ALI books have been given to families to keep, but that is expensive. In future, the program may use a book exchange through the library.

Promotional activities have been developed, under the name ALI Raconte, to make ALI more visible in the community. There are plans to promote ALI with the business community, the church, and other influential groups.

Saint-Rémi is part of 1-2-3 GO!, a community development project focused on early childhood in Québec. ALI is collaborating with 1-2-3 GO! to promote the broader message to parents that everything they do with their child is helpful for early development, and to give them some helpful tips.

There is increasing interest in ALI because of school reforms and a new government reading policy that emphasizes the importance of developing reading skills and the habit of reading as early as possible. “There is a special momentum because of the new policy,” said Gérard Malcuit, from the University of Québec at Montréal, who leads the ALI team. Because of the community partnerships that the university has forged through ALI, funding has been received to develop another program on emergent literacy among 3-5 year-olds, said Gérard. It will be delivered partly in Saint-Rémi and partly in Montréal. “It is like a baby of ALI.”

To find out how ALI is working, a questionnaire is being used to gather opinion on the ALI program from parents, nurseries, trainees and the community’s ALI Action Group about various aspects of the program, including the content, the home visit follow-ups, the needs of parents, training materials, an exchange policy for books, and tools for educators.

Gérard said the current goals are to have:

- more children enrolled in ALI programs – more than one-third of the approximately 400 families with children under age five are now participating in ALI; and
- more community involvement in the program to create more person-power to carry it on.

Jeanine Mendocino from the CLSC said reaching about 130 families should be considered good news. “In other areas, we can go all over the territory just to reach 8-10 children.” She said the influence of ALI can be seen in pre-school programs that now offer books instead of toys to parents.

The farm community has been identified as an area where ALI could have more of an impact. Timing is important. From spring through fall, farm parents are too busy, but in the winter, mothers tend to be at home with the children and could use the ALI activities. Efforts are also being made to introduce ALI to grandparents and babysitters. Older siblings of the ALI age group are often interested in learning how to use ALI in the home.

Nathalie said that more parents are bringing their young children to the library. “There is a change in the community. There is a change individually in the people who apply the program. You can feel it. I think that is very positive.”

A major challenge for the ALI partnership that affects the ultimate local “appropriation” of the program is the fact that the program and the budget are directed from outside St. Rémi. Montréal is not that far away in distance, but it can feel very far away in a small, rural area.

Diane Laberge, a locally-based coordinator of the ALI program in Saint-Rémi, said parents and other local people need to feel more connected to the decision-making of the program.

Those who live and work in St. Rémi and who participate in the ALI Action Group want to see their feedback reflected in details of program implementation. Local people want to contribute, but they want more clarity about roles and responsibilities so they can tell if the task is a good “fit” for their skills.

“The university has been responsible for the program and the evaluation. They are the experts. We are not the experts. It takes time for the community to gain competence. It is starting in the third year, but we have to share more information to make sure we understand where we are going. We need to review our goals and make sure they are common goals,” said Diane.

ALI is an experiment and everyone is learning, said Gérard. The local people may not realize how much influence they have had on ALI. “We are in fact all one community, the community of those who care for the children of St. Rémi. This program has been built step by step, and it is still improving because of all the feedback we have received.” A major commitment of the university is that the ALI program will continue to flourish in St. Rémi when its active role is completed.

7 Connecting in Vancouver

The name of the TLC3 project in Vancouver is emblematic of its greatest strength – CONNECTIONS. Connections with parents, with local agencies, with professionals across Canada and abroad, with governments and private foundations, and with other community groups in British Columbia. The project has spread its net widely, while remaining grounded in two local neighbourhoods. One of the key challenges for this project, virtually from the beginning, has been to keep up with the demands created by all the connections it is making.

CONNECTIONS grew out of a recognition that communities need to find ways to connect with families with very young children to help improve the children's long-term development, for the benefit of families and the larger community.

This project chose to concentrate on infants and toddlers. Families join the program before their children are 15 months of age, and many children start before they are three months' old. They "graduate" when the child turns two. The program started at the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, and has now expanded to Collingwood Neighbourhood House. In the areas served by these two centres, there are many families with economic and other difficulties, but CONNECTIONS is not targeted to at-risk families. All families are welcome. Its inclusive nature is one of the project's defining features.

The core program is *Parent Child Mother Goose*, which provides a group experience for parents and their babies and young children, focusing on the use of rhymes, songs and stories. The program helps to strengthen the children's language development and other skills, and it supports the parent-child relationship. The group experience encourages parents to support one another. The programming spans 30 weeks in three 10-week sessions from September to June.

In addition, each family is given some individual time with a speech-language pathologist, called *First Look at Talking*. It gives parents an opportunity to ask questions of the staff about their child's development and to find out more about the TLC3 national project, including the evaluation process. It gives staff a chance to screen the child's early development and to help with referrals to specialized services. Parents who return to the program for another year – and there are usually several – can have *Further Looks at Talking*.

After each group session of *Parent Child Mother Goose*, two program facilitators and a speech-language pathologist meet to "debrief". The debriefing involves reviewing how the session worked for each parent and child and discussing how it could be better. The CONNECTIONS team has identified this investment of time and effort as crucial.

According to Michelle Droettboom, one of the coordinators of CONNECTIONS: “You have to plan. This is not just about planning to do this or that song at the next session. It is planning next time to sit beside a mother who doesn’t get up and mix with the other parents during the break. It is planning to ask the group a question that you think will draw out a parent who is shy about talking. This kind of planning takes time, and everyone is very busy. But you have to do it.”

In addition to *Mother Goose*, the Hanen Centre’s *You Make The Difference* program has been offered when there is a group of parents who have the time and who want to delve further into how their child learns, and how they can read and respond to the cues their child is sending them.

There is a follow-up with parents who have participated in CONNECTIONS. Called *Keeping In Touch*, it happens a year after the family has graduated, and is a way for the project to monitor how well the family is doing, and to encourage the parents to continue being active participants in their toddler’s learning and development. The plan is to continue the annual contact until the child enters school.

It has been interesting for the team to see the differences in how CONNECTIONS works at two different sites. The Kiwassa team has mentored Collingwood, but there is a comfort level with Collingwood going its own way on structure and procedures. For example, at Kiwassa, parents have been “nurtured” into the program, whereas at Collingwood, parents recruit themselves. Kiwassa has tried to take all the parents who show up, and has struggled sometimes with the large size of the group. Collingwood has limited the numbers and opted for a waiting list. Parents usually have to wait no longer than one 10-week session before getting in.

Collingwood was chosen as the second site because it had a different ethno-cultural mix; there was good space available; there was a keen staff member, and it was very involved with a diverse number of programs in the community. Perhaps because Kiwassa was approached with the opportunity to house the TLC3 program, and Collingwood competed to be the second site, Collingwood is more conscious that it will have to find other ways to sustain TLC3 in future.

Having faced some challenges with space for programming, the CONNECTIONS team is very conscious of the importance of attending to logistics: Where are you going to run the program? Does the location have enough room? What is the competition for space like in the building? Will the facility commit to dedicated space? What is the floor like (for little ones crawling around)?

The team also recommends that people who are starting up a program try to find someone else who is already offering the program and go and take a look. Spend time finding out about how they set up. Get a visual image of how it works. Take part in one of their sessions. And then plan, plan, plan.

CONNECTIONS is helping a lot of other people get started. Training others to do what CONNECTIONS does – and thus expanding its sphere of influence – has been a highlight of this project so far.

- More than 500 people across the province have been trained to lead *Parent Child Mother Goose* groups. CONNECTIONS managed the training, with support from the B.C. Infant Development Program, until mid-1998 when the Toronto office of *Parent Child Mother Goose* took over responsibility for administration. The training has been delivered by Michelle Droettboom, a coordinator, and Beth Hutchinson, a facilitator, with CONNECTIONS.
- All the children’s librarians in Vancouver have received *Parent Child Mother Goose* training.
- CONNECTIONS has started “gatherings” with groups that have started *Parent Child Mother Goose* programs in their communities. Leaders of these groups share their successes and challenges. There were six sites represented in September, 1999, and 13 in January, 2000.

CONNECTIONS has inspired parents and professionals who have come into direct contact with the project at the two neighbourhood houses. For example:

- A group of parents from the program continued meeting over the summer on their own.
- A father who attended the program started a Dad’s group.
- Three parents serve on the CONNECTIONS Advisory Committee.
- Some Kiwassa parents have taken *Parent Child Mother Goose* training so they can run their own toddler program.
- Collingwood has applied for a grant for an Aboriginal *Parent Child Mother Goose* program.

The CONNECTIONS team tends to make everything look easy. But it hasn’t been. A major challenge that this project faced leading up to this mid-point was finding a partner for the evaluation that suited the community focus, personalities and workload of the coordinators. A change was made during 1999 from a university-based evaluation advisor to a consultant.

Sue Formosa, who is a coordinator of CONNECTIONS, said the process of developing the evaluation has also involved connecting. “I have made reconnections back to my professors from graduate school around early language analysis. There’s been tons of growing. I recently read two issues of a journal on research collaborations. Before, I would have put them on the shelf. Now I actually understand what this is about. At first, the evaluation felt scary, cob-webby and confusing. It isn’t now. It’s clear, and we’re into it.”

CONNECTIONS also has a message about keeping connected within a project.

Everyone on the core team has a lot of other work to do, in addition to TLC3.

“You have to really dialogue so everyone stays connected,” said Sue. “You have to talk about difficulties clearly. You have to protect the time you need to get together. You have to be receptive to input.”

8 Integrating in Toronto

If all the TLC3 projects were lined up for a picture-taking, the one that would be the most difficult to get into focus would be Growing Together in Toronto. That is because the project has been so thoroughly integrated into the program that it is enriching.

Growing Together is a program of the Hincks-Dellcrest Treatment Centre, in collaboration with the city's Department of Public Health. It is a universal prevention/early intervention program offering a wide range of services to all children from birth to age five and their families in a defined geographic area, which is the most densely populated in Canada. It has a national presence. It was selected by the Invest in Kids Foundation as an exemplar for replication and Growing Together programs now operate in Quebec and Nova Scotia.

The TLC3 project is nestled within Growing Together (and has the same name). It is the most clinical of the TLC3 projects in that its mission is to enhance the development of infants and young children up to age five with identified language, cognition and related developmental difficulties. The project fits within the mandate of TLC3 because it meets a crucial need in the larger program, which is open to all children in the neighbourhood.

Families are referred to the TLC3 part of the program by staff of the Growing Together prevention/early intervention program and by community agencies. Most external agencies do not distinguish between Growing Together and the TLC3 part of it, but they know this is a program where infants and young children who are not developing as well as they should can get help.

Growing Together is located in a cluster of high-rises which house a large multi-cultural mix of families, mostly living on low incomes, many on social assistance. The housing complex is so big it constitutes a neighbourhood in itself, called St. James Town. Many of the families in St. James Town are recent immigrants, coping with the stress of adapting to a new home, language, and culture.

The TLC3 program in St. James Town shares some characteristics with its surroundings. Like the housing complex, Growing Together is jammed into tight space. It feels even more crowded because of the waiting list of families needing services for their children. Staff resources and time are limited. Like its community, Growing Together is multilingual, providing services in 14 languages, requiring frequent use of interpreters.

Growing Together TLC3 includes one full-time early childhood consultant who also serves as the TLC3 coordinator. The rest of the program delivery staff are part-time, including a psychologist, an early childhood educator, and a Tamil-speaking home visitor. In the summer of 1999, a Tamil-speaking research assistant and a research coordinator were also hired. In January 2000, a Tamil-speaking communication aide, who is a trained speech pathologist from India, was hired one day a week. More than half the families in the population served by Growing Together are Tamil-speaking.

The early childhood consultant, Deirdre McKibbin, provides support, advice and materials on children's language and cognitive development in many settings. Home visiting is the largest part of the role, providing modelling, supportive coaching techniques and strategies, as well as additional resources that the child or family may need. She organizes and facilitates two parenting groups: *Parent Child Mother Goose* and *You Make The Difference*.

Parent Child Mother Goose is a group experience for parents and children up to two and a half years, focusing on the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs and stories together. Parents gain skills and confidence as learners and as parents. Children improve their language and pre-literacy skills, gain self-esteem and social skills. The program runs from October to June in three, 10-week sessions. The program has been supported by additional funding from a private foundation and benefitted from the help of dedicated volunteers and students.

You Make The Difference is a program of The Hanen Centre in Toronto. The program builds on the strengths of parents and children, and encourages parents to tune in to their children. It is based on the 3A way: Allow your child to lead, Adapt to share the moment, and Add information and experience. The program has been run three times a year, in English and in Tamil, with the help of the Tamil communication aide.

Child care consultation is also provided in the St. James Town area to child care centres that do not have resource educators on staff. TLC3 shares programming ideas and strategies with staff, children and their families, and helps parents find additional resources in their community, as needed.

The *Jumpstart* program, formerly known as the preschool program, is the most visible part of the TLC3 project at Growing Together. The children attend two half-day sessions a week. The program operates on an intervention basis; children have individual program plans that allow Nilofar Sleem Liakat, the early childhood educator, to implement specific strategies and activities for each child.

Programming is most often literature and theme-based with activities focusing on group learning in all areas of development, especially cognition and language. Children are re-assessed in an informal way at the end of each block (a three-month period), and suggestions may be made by staff who are involved with the family and child. Nilofar also supervises and guides the many volunteers and students who give their time.

TLC3 also provides developmental assessments by a psychologist, who also gives parents and staff recommendations for programming for individual children at home and in other settings, such as in the *Jumpstart* program or in child care centres in the neighbourhood.

A challenge for this project is to build trust among families who are newcomers to the country and who are afraid of what to them is a strange, perhaps intimidating system. Having a home visitor who speaks Tamil is a big help in convincing families it's okay to accept this assistance for their children. Once they go through an assessment of their child's development, they are very interested in what it means and what they should do.

Teamwork and communication are important for the TLC3 staff at Growing Together. The TLC3 team does a lot of case planning. Families may be referred to day care centres, physiotherapy and occupational therapy and medical facilities in the neighbourhood. Two parents who "graduated" from TLC3 programs are now working for the provincial Healthy Babies, Healthy Children home visiting program.

The national reputation of Growing Together and its founding director were for the most part experienced as highly positive by TLC3. But it did present the program and the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute with a challenge. Unlike the other TLC3 programs, the Lawson grant was not experienced as a "gift from heaven". Growing Together was already talking to the Lawson Foundation about a grant at the time TLC3 was conceived. Instead of a separate grant, Growing Together received Lawson funding through TLC3. One result appears to have been less initial understanding of and enthusiasm for TLC3 goals and objectives. However, the symposium of 2000 seemed to mark a watershed with the attendance for the first time of a senior manager from the larger project, validating the benefit of belonging to this national enterprise for staff.

Another challenge was the retirement of the founding director of Growing Together. Because TLC3 has really been absorbed into the rest of the program, the search for a new leader has affected TLC3 too.

The impact that TLC3 is having may be harder to see from the outside, but the TLC3 staff see it every day. Nilofar sees mothers ploughing through winter snow and slush with their strollers to get their children to the *Jumpstart* program. Deirdre has seen parents proudly demonstrate how they are playing and talking with their new baby as a result of what they learned about language and learning with the first child.

And then there was the mother who told her second child not to say anything during a language assessment so the child would be sure to be identified as needing some of that extra help that TLC3 offers! The strategy didn't work, but it speaks volumes about how the program is accepted and appreciated among parents in St. James Town.

9 Laying a Foundation in Meadow Lake

TLC3 came to Meadow Lake just as the Tribal Council was preparing the groundwork for new child care spaces to be developed in nine small First Nations communities dotted across the landscape of northwestern Saskatchewan. It was great timing for this TLC3 project, which is called One Foot Forward.

One Foot Forward is helping to lay a strong foundation for quality child care services and for the future of the First Nations of Meadow Lake.

Children are the future of Buffalo River and Flying Dust and Canoe Lake and Birch Narrows and all the other First Nations that belong to the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. In the words of the Council, it is the children who will “inherit the struggle to retain and enhance the people’s culture, language and history, who continue the quest for economic progress for a better quality of life, and who move forward with a strengthened resolve to plan their own destiny.”

The Tribal Council is the umbrella administrative structure delivering services and managing programs on behalf of the nine First Nations. It has been carefully developing a comprehensive child care program, including a child care training centre and a culturally appropriate curriculum, since 1988.

Funding from Human Resources Development Canada allowed for the development of 78 new funded child care spaces to provide families with quality child care opportunities in their own communities. The contribution that One Foot Forward has made to this initiative includes:

- language and cognitive developmental screening for children entering a day care centre or day care home;
- parent education;
- training for caregivers and educators;
- advice to child care providers on their programs; and
- raising of community awareness.

The TLC3 staff work out of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council offices, within the child care program area. A big challenge for this project is distance. You have to cover hundreds of kilometres to make the circuit of the nine First Nations. This kind of travel takes way more than the usual amount of time that other projects would spend going to see families.

One Foot Forward's Rhonda Schultz, a speech-language pathologist, has been working with the First Nations as their plans for child care took shape, talking to parents about how children learn and the role they can play in their children's development, and organizing community play fairs for parents and children. A lot of time and effort was invested early on in promoting awareness and understanding of One Foot Forward.

It took until mid-1999 to get most of the community day homes and child care centres licensed and stocked with learning materials and operating in the nine First Nations. Now that has happened, managing demand is even more of a challenge than it was before. "Providers want training, and parents want programs," said Rhonda.

And projects require paperwork. Rhonda is not keen on all the deskwork – she would rather be out in the communities – but some of the paperwork has really paid off. She has applied for health and literacy and other types of grants. The Saskatchewan Literacy Network has become a supporter, providing funding for the *Come Read With Me* program, which was developed in Saskatchewan. Rhonda is looking for outside collaborators such as First Nations-run companies or church groups for donations of resources for the child care facilities.

Rhonda's communications networking and promotional efforts have also ensured that this project is getting known beyond Meadow Lake. Requests for more information have come from many organizations.

It was good news when Lena Crighton joined One Foot Forward part-time in 1999. But the legwork she is doing, from home to home, gathering basic family and child health information for the evaluation, is generating more interest in what the project can do to help the children. The goal is to be able to have Lena full-time (both feet?) in TLC3.

There are a number of initiatives to support young children, parents and child care workers being developed in the First Nations. Child care providers have been trained to implement a new *Bright Start* cognitive program for preschool children. The Meadow Lake Tribal Council is developing *Head Start* and Early Childhood Intervention Program initiatives on behalf of the First Nations. As time permits, Rhonda has responded to requests for assistance with staff training and identification of resource materials for these other programs.

There are always new ideas percolating at One Foot Forward. Parents are volunteering to help in some of the day cares so Rhonda and Lena are looking at developing training for parent aides. Rhonda sees the need for a coordinating, planning, training body for prevention initiatives, and she and Lena are “brainstorming” this as a possible role for TLC3 in future.

One thing this project never lacks is spirit, whether it’s getting the Health Authority to get off their chairs and perform all the actions for “goin’ on a bear hunt” with Rhonda, or whether it’s this declaration of confidence in the annual report in 1999:

“The biggest learning for TLC3 is the fact that we can do anything. If it needs to be designed, developed, implemented, promoted or whatever, TLC3 has the resources to make it happen. We have learned that we are fulfilling a need within Meadow Lake Tribal Council First Nations and that validates our model and our work ... We have realized that (finally) we are unique...”

10 Re-Visioning in Regina

The Regina Early Learning Centre was a respected and long-established community-based organization when TLC3 came along. But unlike some organizations that become entrenched in tradition, the Early Learning Centre also believes in lifelong learning. It has transformed itself through the TLC3 experience.

TLC3 has done far more than add to the Centre's programming mix, according to Anne Luke, its Executive Director. The mission of the Centre has been redefined. "We have a new sense of who we are and what we are doing, and how we have changed as an organization. We are no longer a preschool with some parent outreach. We are a multi-faceted program for children and their families," she said.

The TLC3 project in Regina has three major components:

- The Centre has been able to reach out to a whole new population of children. Its *Parents as Teachers* (PAT) program, an interactive parent-infant program to foster development of early thinking and communication, is geared to parents with children up to age three.
- The centre-based core preschool program for the three-to-five-year age group has been revised to incorporate strategies from the curriculum of the High/Scope Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Staff have been trained to implement the new curriculum.
- Programs for families include the *Come Read With Me* and *PRINTS* literacy programs. In addition, the preschool teachers continue to make home visits (four times a year), and there are six parent-staff workshops per year, which use an adult learning model.

The transformation of the Early Learning Centre actually sparked something of an identity crisis for the organization at the mid-point of TLC3. Anne thinks that it was a good thing to work through in the second year. The Early Learning Centre has come out of it stronger and more focused.

"We discovered or rediscovered the importance of integrating new techniques and adapting them to make them our own, rather than just replicating them," said Anne. "It came to a head when we were trying to use a child observation record from High/Scope. It wasn't us. We had to find our own way. We went through an in-depth process with preschool staff identifying exactly what it is we want children to learn. It was key to developing our own observation tools. It also helped us re-ground ourselves."

With all the changes that have occurred in a relatively short time have come increased pressures internally and externally. A major challenge is finding time to deal with them all. At the end of 1999, Anne was arranging for funding for an administrative review to see what improvements could be made so that administrative practices would match the demands of the expanded program and allow the Centre to play a role in wider early childhood initiatives.

The Early Learning Centre has always had partners in the community, but there are a lot more of them these days. The more partnering there is, the harder it becomes to separate out funding and program administration. For example, the *Parents As Teachers* home visitor may do extra visits to a high-needs family under another program. Part of the challenge with partnerships is to set boundaries on what you can and cannot do, and develop policies and protocols so that you are not stepping on other people's turf.

The Early Learning Centre made something of a splash in the community by having an official launch of its PAT program, attended by dignitaries, including the Mayor of Regina, local MLAs, the local MP, and government officials. The Centre is being recognized provincially and nationally. For example, Canada Post gave the Centre a Literacy Award, and the Saskatchewan Arts Council gave a grant for musical instruments for the children. Anne has been involved in the formation of a Canadian association for the PAT program.

The Early Learning Centre works with families who are living on low incomes; many are from the Aboriginal community in Regina. Through long experience, the Centre has learned effective ways to involve parents and bring them out to events. "Parents love to come to our events because we look after them," said Anne. "We give them a good meal, not just a snack. They come to be nurtured themselves for a change. They also get things from our make-and-take workshops to take home for their children, like puppets made out of wooden spoons."

Parents receive certificates for participating in workshops that cover all sorts of topics, such as behaviour management and language development. Home visitors have noticed that some parents display their certificates proudly on the walls at home. Teachers have also been asked to keep an eye out for cross-over benefits from the other programs – like the little girl who started borrowing books every day after her mom attended the *Come Read With Me* program.

Parents make up the majority of members on the Centre's governing board. They provide advice and direction. Board participation is also a learning experience for parents. Parents are active volunteers in activities. For example, a parent has been trained to help deliver the *PRINTS* program; a parent who used to have a child at the centre is the official videotaper of events, while another parent provides musical entertainment.

The Centre recognizes that staff members need time and nurturing too. “Our staff have bought into the changes, but that’s not the end of it. We need to work to maintain the commitment. It’s a challenge for all of us to maintain the spontaneity, to be excited about new learning in the face of all the day-to-day things ... something has broken down, or someone’s child is sick,” Anne said.

Communication is important – between teachers and home visitors, between staff and administration, between the Centre and the families, between the administration and the board. So is planning. In fact, staff are finding that the plan-do-review concept that is used in the preschool is a useful tool for working with parents as well.

The Centre has received a number of project funding applications recently in such areas as child health, literacy and food security. “You feel you have to keep applying or they will forget you’re there. This kind of funding keeps us alive. I wish more of it were for five years like TLC3 instead of a year or two at a time.”

Anne has met with several key people in government and agencies in the health, social services and education sectors to discuss life after the five years of funding from TLC3. The Centre’s re-visioning as a multi-faceted program for children and families places it squarely at the centre of political and public interest arising from research on child development in the earliest years of life. There is a Provincial intersectoral committee looking at the early years from birth to age three.

Anne is hoping that the Early Learning Centre might be used as a source of ideas and a place for training – a centre where the critical elements for successful supports for young children and their families could be modelled. “We have something to contribute.”

11 What Are We Learning?

In trying to identify what has been learned so far, we think it is important not to oversimplify the complexities of the experience. Therefore, while we can point to some things that seem to have worked well for TLC3, we have also tried to indicate some downsides. The first set of “learnings” has to do with setting up and managing a national project. The next are more about implementing and sustaining a program at the community level. There is some overlap.

These points are conceived as the kind of advice that we might be able to give someone considering starting up a TLC3 in the future. They are not a to-do list. They are not the result of an evaluation process. They are simply some statements that try to reflect our collective experience with TLC3 at this point in its evolution.

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Getting a quality, funded project off the ground in communities across the country takes a lot of hard work and commitment.

There are probably quite a few organizations out there thinking: “Just give me \$1 million a year and I could run a successful program across the country too.” It’s true that the funding is a wonderful positive incentive. TLC3 would not have happened without it. But there is a lot more to this process than show-me-the-money. The community sites of TLC3 were up and running in a very short time, but that is only because people worked extraordinarily hard to take advantage of what they saw as a remarkable, unexpected “gift” to their communities. It was an opportunity not to be missed. Along the way, there have been lots of challenges to work through. The initial commitment has been maintained and even deepened.

Be clear about your goals. Then give communities as much flexibility as possible. It will generate tremendous energy and creativity.

TLC3 has given community projects the freedom to evolve and adapt and grow and learn. We believe it is one of the project’s greatest strengths. The flexibility to be creative is not carte blanche to do whatever you want. The goals of TLC3 were clear. Agreements were signed between the national manager and the sites. But those agreements were not so restrictive as to limit local innovation. The ongoing monitoring has been focused on gathering information and offering assistance if it’s needed, rather than telling people what to do. As one of the sites put it, the oversight has been “on tap” (available when you want to tap into it) rather than “on top” (hovering over you all the time).

The results so far have been impressive. The sites have used this opportunity to bring innovative programming to their communities. The diverse programs that have been created reflect local needs. The programs are making a difference for children and parents. We are confident that the evaluations will show positive outcomes. The flexibility has unleashed energy and encouraged local partnerships.

Recognize that giving freedom can be more demanding than making strict rules. Do it anyway.

The norm for receiving funding is the request-for-proposal or grant application that sets out detailed criteria. Community programs may sometimes have to contort themselves to comply, but they know when they get the money what is expected of them. TLC3, on the other hand, was more like an invitation to communities to develop a concept and put it into action. The goals were pretty clear, but not how to get there.

The freedom to innovate is also the freedom to fumble. The people involved at the sites were left wondering sometimes whether they were meeting some unspoken but extremely high national standard. It happened with initial implementation of the programs and then again with design of the evaluation. So it can be identified as a trend. Let's face it. Being told exactly what to do and how to do it can be relaxing. Being told to figure out what to do, do it well, and tell us how you did it can be very demanding.

The national managers of this project were in somewhat the same position. They too were learning as they went along. They did not have experience with running a national project. The funder did not set strict criteria. The reaction was the same as the local sites – work even harder and worry a lot.

We think the results overall have been worth the struggle.

Working with community partners who have a track record can give you a head start.

A key to the success of TLC3 has been the choice of organizations and people in the communities to make this project a reality. The “host” organizations had experience with community-based programs that were respectful and reflective of their local context. The people involved had credibility. They had not necessarily run a program like TLC3 before, but they had experience working with the community, and they had an established reputation. That solid foundation allowed TLC3 to launch programs at a much faster pace than might otherwise have been the case.

Embedding your project in an existing organization or program means that you will inherit some “baggage”.

An organization that has been around awhile, no matter how great its track record, will have some history, some of which will affect the new project. There is no organization that is perpetually problem-free. What you look for is how they solve their problems.

Being part of a national project has many benefits.

Being part of national project is energizing and validating. It has allowed the site project teams to take risks they might not have taken if they were not part of something bigger than themselves. Several of the sites have found their local profile has been raised by being part of a national project. They are proud of being part of something that is contributing to learning and is uniquely Canadian. Being part of a national project has helped give people confidence that no matter how big the challenge, they must be up to it. Knowing you can contact the national manager for advice provides some reassurance. Being able to get together at the national symposium has given people inspiration. It has also reassured them that they are not alone.

Letting the national evaluation evolve may be unconventional, but it has worked for us.

Many projects start out with hard-and-fast program guidelines and pre-set evaluation protocols. TLC3 has opted for flexibility in both program development and evaluation design. It is working for us. Giving the site projects responsibility for local evaluation has meant a learning experience for them. The learning is something that they will have forever. It is expected that the tools they have chosen for their evaluation will be used again. We doubt that would have been true if the national manager had handed out a battery of tests to be administered. There will be more learning for everyone involved in the project nationally through the development of the cluster evaluation.

Having national advisors gives credibility. They also provide concrete assistance.

The national advisors to TLC3 have provided valuable advice, and they lend credibility to the project because they are known in their fields of research or policy-making or communications. Some of them are very hands-on with the project at the community level, sitting on the local advisory board and working on the site evaluation design.

There is no substitute for personal contact.

In this day and age of electronic everything, there may be a tendency to say that a project like this should be “virtual”, that real in-person contact is not really necessary. Not true. The site teams want and need the annual symposium as a time to recharge their batteries, to get to know each other better, to be inspired by what others are doing, and to be “fed” some new ideas. The symposium is also an opportunity for representatives of the funders, the national advisors and the national managers to meet in person and to listen to the site teams first-hand. The site visits made by members of the national evaluation team are also important for understanding the diversity of contexts in which TLC3 is operating, as well as what and how the sites are doing.

You need a team that is strong on collaboration and problem-solving.

Both nationally and locally, it is important to have people who are good at working with others and at brainstorming solutions. An ability to collaborate and problem-solve is something to look for in a local organization’s track record.

All of the site projects have involved collaborations, among a number of organizations and many individuals. Not only have partnerships helped to enrich and expand what the site teams have been able to do with their TLC3 funding, those partnerships in the community are probably our best hope for sustaining TLC3 programming in the future.

Every project has had some challenges to meet. There is no such thing as a problem-free project. Therefore, it is important that the people involved be creative about dealing with whatever comes up.

AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Make sure there is a shared vision from the beginning. Keep revisiting it.

A lot of people wince when you talk about “vision”. But establishing buy-in to a vision or mission is one of the fundamentals. Clarifying the vision helps ensure that everyone involved is on the same track. When things have gotten off-track, it was sometimes because there wasn't buy-in to the purpose of TLC3, i.e. it is not enough simply to offer a preschool program – the program must have a clear focus on improving the children's language and cognitive development. In other cases, there was some feeling of having lost sight of common goals. Sometimes, when a lot of change has taken place, re-visiting the vision can really help people focus on what is most important to the community, the organization offering the program, the families it serves, and the people who work in it.

Different strategies work for different communities.

There are TLC3 projects from sea to sea. They share a vision, but their programs are different because their communities are different. Even in two neighbourhoods in the same city, where similar programs are being delivered, the implementation strategies are different. It may have to do with cultural sensitivities or space limitations or a host of other things. Diversity works.

Expect some resistance to change, even when it's good change.

There has been some resistance to adapting to TLC3 pretty well everywhere. Staff may be reluctant because they fear additional workload when their days are already full, or they may not like seeing what they feel is a good, established program disrupted by new elements and new training. Sometimes a new project, with new funding, feels like a “takeover” from the perspective of the board of the local organization. Sometimes the goals of the project are not well understood (e.g. here come the babysitters). You have to work at embedding change. It doesn't just happen.

Building working partnerships is challenging. Do not underestimate the gaps to be bridged.

Close working relationships require a lot of attention. A helpful piece of advice may be not to take your partners for granted, especially if you are trying to work across a traditional divide – between sectors like education or social services or health or between an academic environment and a community program.

Partnerships can bring complications as well as benefits. For one thing, they make for messy evaluations. It has already been pointed out to some sites that the addition of TLC3 programming has complicated the evaluation of an existing program by another funder. The lesson may be that if governments and others are going to promote partnerships (which they are), then they will have to adapt to reality. Communities are not going to turn down opportunities to start programs to help families because it will spoil the symmetry of someone's evaluation plan.

Sometimes partnerships don't work out. Don't give up too easily, and make sure you have tried to repair, revise, or rebuild the partnership before you dissolve it. Being clear about what is not working is important. But also don't cling too long to a relationship that is not working – you may miss the window of opportunity provided by the funder. Find other groups and people out there who want to be your partner, and who want to work with you.

Planning is essential.

There is a lot of logistical planning to be done to set up a new program for families, including choosing a location, finding a suitable space and perhaps fixing it up, finding out what is going to be happening in the next room (e.g. are there other children napping or is there a band practice?), arranging for child care for other children of participating parents, preparing food, and so on. That kind of advance planning will save you time and headaches later. The level of detail is important, down to how cold or rough the floor is for babies to crawl on. Once the program is running, planning continues to be essential. Planning includes not only printing up flyers for the next session or getting consent forms from parents, but planning to talk to a parent about accepting a home visit or making a referral for assistance or calling the public health nurse about a family who hasn't shown up lately.

Don't believe people who tell you that parents will not come out to an opportunity for their children. They will.

Every site has struggled with the positive problem of high demand. It doesn't matter whether the parents have little education and are living on social assistance or they teach university courses and earn a high income. Having children is a new experience for everyone. Parents are hungry for information and support. They want to know how to foster their children's development. Expect high demand, and prepare for it. Put procedures in place to deal with it.

Scheduling programs for busy working parents may be difficult. Families who are struggling with hunger and health problems may have trouble summoning the energy to participate. But they all want to do well by their children, and under the right conditions – that is, where there is respect and encouragement – they will come out to a good program.

Parents can and do help each other. A group experience encourages peer support. It is empowering.

One of the really good things that the community projects have found is how parents help each other. Just being with other parents in a learning group can be an enormous boost for a lonely or depressed parent. They learn more than rhymes and songs and book titles. They learn that there are other parents who are struggling too. They learn there are other people who care and who can help. They learn they can do a lot more than they thought they could.

Time is a real obstacle. There is never enough of it.

Every TLC3 project feels the time squeeze. Time for administration. Time to brainstorm that great idea somebody had a few weeks ago. Time to pay more attention to staff needs. Time to pursue those families who are too tired, too desperate, too disorganized, too isolated, too whatever, to get near the local resource centre or neighbourhood house or preschool. Most of the programs are full, sometimes with waiting lists. Most people involved in TLC3 have other work responsibilities in addition to this project. They have families too. It's tough. Seek a balance in how you allocate your time. Set boundaries to help guide what you do and do not do. Don't forget to pause and reflect on what you are doing – it will be time well spent.

Expect leadership and other staff changes.

We live in a mobile society. People change jobs, families move away, people become ill. Some of the sites have had a harder time with personnel changes than others because the changes have been at the top of the organization. Being part of a national project may help because it gives the new person a context. The national manager, Hincks-Dellcrest, provides a national infrastructure and institutional memory for the project as a whole.

The one advantage of staff changes is that people who leave will (hopefully) take what they have learned through TLC3 with them to their next position.

News about the importance of the early years of child development is spreading. New doors are opening.

More and more people seem to have heard about the latest brain research. Thanks mainly to private foundations in Canada and the U.S. that have chosen to make the early years of child development a high priority and put their money into it, the “news” has made it to the popular media. There is heightened interest in early learning and development among government policy-makers, parents, community funders, community leaders, foundations, educators, voluntary organizations, and others. This raised consciousness seems to be opening doors of opportunity in many communities that were closed before.

Connecting is important. Networking works.

TLC3 was expected to have some impact beyond the individual children and families attending programs. The spinoff effects of these projects have far exceeded initial expectations. The sites are connecting to other neighbourhoods, other community groups, professional associations, government departments and agencies and others. One way in which the projects are expanding their sphere of influence is training (e.g. in British Columbia, more than 500 people have been trained in the *Parent Child Mother Goose* program). Another way is through media attention (e.g. public launches of TLC3 programs in Regina and Dartmouth). Other avenues include professional associations, university/research linkages, community newsletters, speeches and presentations.

Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Communication is not just sending out information, although that is part of it. Communication is two-way. Dialogue requires listening and being receptive to what the other person is trying to tell you. In projects like TLC3, there are basically two levels of communication – internal and external. Both are important. Internal communication is essential to keeping people within a project not only informed but engaged in the program’s ongoing growth and improvement. Without it, partners may misunderstand each other, staff may feel alienated, and parents may resist getting involved.

External communication helps foster partnerships with other organizations. It also helps to promote the program and its goals. Making “friends” in the community is key to future sustainability. But it’s a big world out there and you can’t do everything. There will always be some people who think they should have been in your communications loop and weren’t included. It is impossible to tell everyone in a big city who thinks they should know about the new project on the block. But give it your best try, and have a plan to deal with the ones you missed.

It is hard enough to keep up with all the demands for information at the local sites; it is no wonder that there has not been that much site-to-site communication across the country.

But the lack of communication has meant that some people have only really felt part of a national project when they are at the annual symposium.

Local committees have brought together a range of valued advisors, including parents.

The divide between the sectors of research and policy-making and community program delivery has been successfully bridged at some of the sites through their advisory committees. These committees often include a government staff person and a university researcher. They also include parents, who contribute to decision-making and keep the projects rooted in the community. Formation of committees can generate greater community ownership of programming. It can contribute to more promotion and better understanding of the project and its goals.

If you have a good thing going, others may want to co-opt it. That can be good and bad.

It may be infuriating that one's work is co-opted by others or borrowed without credit. But in the field of community services, it happens a lot. If we see ourselves as incubators, not owners, of the values and goals and ideas of TLC3, then it becomes easier to celebrate when they are picked up and used by others. On the other hand, people who co-opt work of others sometimes misinterpret or distort the original ideas. The point is not who gets credit, but protecting the integrity of what has been created.

We must give each other validation when it is not forthcoming from others.

Sustainability may be achieved in different ways.

The issue of sustainability is more complex than it might first appear. In one sense, it is about finding funding to replace the Lawson grant to keep a particular program at a particular community site up-and-running. Whenever there is an opportunity, the site teams are seeking sustaining partnerships, and new sources of funding that will carry on beyond the five years of TLC3.

At sites where TLC3 has added new programming dimensions – such as the *Parents As Teachers* (PAT) program through which the Regina Early Learning Centre is reaching out to a younger population of children under age three – there is the challenge of identifying how to continue the enriched programming when the TLC3 funding ends. The Early Learning Centre was already well known in Regina, but TLC3 has expanded its network, which makes the prospect of finding other funders more likely.

There are other kinds of sustainability. All the projects have parents, community volunteers, and other professionals who will be able to carry on their work, perhaps not in exactly the same place or the same way as TLC3, but carry on in ways that will help young children and their families.

For example, in Vancouver, the CONNECTIONS project has actively promoted the use of the *Parent Child Mother Goose* program across British Columbia through training, and has nurtured and supported new groups who have started *Parent Child Mother Goose* programs in their communities. That is one form of sustainability for this site.

There is also a question of how to sustain TLC3 as a national network – how to maintain site-to-site contact, and how to share the learning and feed the spirit – after the five-year national project is over. Participants have emphasized how important it has been to get together in person at the symposium every year to compare notes, to be inspired by the work that others are doing, and to reflect on their own achievements and challenges. The management team at Hincks-Dellcrest is considering how to tackle this aspect of sustainability.

Everyone is learning a lot.

The people involved with the sites have a lot of experience. They were chosen for their track record. But they are learning a lot, which is wonderful for them and for the project.

12 Conclusion

Freda Martin may have put it best when she told the 2000 symposium: “We have a richness of stories. But I think we have a common story to tell too.”

Everyone brings something of value to the common table. The plans for a cluster evaluation require a national collaboration among the sites, the national managers and advisors, and the funders. All of us must come together to brainstorm our collective conclusions about this national demonstration project.

A selection of comments from the exchange among a few members of the National Advisory Committee at the symposium illustrates the nature of the learning that is happening.

Alan Pence, from the University of Victoria, described what he heard from the sites about how TLC3 is working as a “cascading effect” that flows both ways, with knowledge passing from the professionals to the families, and from the families back to the professionals and to the policy-makers. “It usually only runs one way – I’m on top and I tell you. That attitude is the nub of our problem in social services.”

That led to a discussion of “ownership” of TLC3. Ownership must rest with the families and the community for the outcomes of TLC3 to be sustainable. But ownership at any one level cannot be allowed to block the cascading of knowledge. “The heart of cascading is listening to others in the chain and respecting what they have to say,” suggested Sharon Griffin, from Clark University. “And then you evolve,” said Mandy Kay-Raining Bird from Dalhousie University. “You don’t remain the same.”

“As long as you listen first,” said Alan. “Listening, and then engagement and then transformation on all sides. Creativity is not just passing on what is known.”

“Different sites were more or less defined in the beginning,” said Mandy, “but they have all been impacted by the process because they were open to learning ... It is important not to have preconceived notions. But there is hope.”

Bob Glossop, from the Vanier Institute of the Family, noted: “Local sites have invested their intellectual capital in this national project. With their talents and imagination and limited resources, they have made this project what it is.”

“Personal transformation is one of the key indicators ... You are not just engaged in service delivery, you are becoming part of other people’s lives,” said Alan. Finally, in reference to the popular metaphor of the dead canary in the mineshaft as a warning of trouble in the

(social) environment, Alan added: “If the canary comes to life singing, you know this is more than the usual thing.”

In light of that last comment, we conclude with an attempt to capture the spirit of TLC3.

On Capturing the Spirit of TLC3

There is nothing like seeing a butterfly in flight. Not even pictures come close, and written descriptions, while they provide interesting detail, lack the spirit of the real thing. An aspect of TLC3 that is very difficult to convey on the printed page is the enthusiasm, energy and emotion that are evident among the core group of people at the sites who are actually making things happen.

What is so hard to capture?

... the catch in a voice telling of an unemployed young father in a parent group who has gone from being stern and remote with his young child to being loving and open, and the wonderful effect on the child.

... the respect for the personal journey of a mother who was depressed and withdrawn and who has blossomed with the support of others into a woman no longer afraid to stand up for what she believes is best for her little son.

... the gratitude for the parents who are strong enough and generous enough to take others under their wing or who volunteer for training so that the community can take ownership of this learning.

... the feeling of pride when the worth of the TLC3 project is recognized and celebrated by people of influence – by mayors and cabinet ministers, by experts in the field of child development, by the media.

... the laughter in a roomful of people hearing about a TLC3 storyteller, who puts her whole self into the action of the narrative, coaxing a bunch of VIPS into loosening up to “play” along as parents and kids do.

... the expression of satisfaction and relief that comes from completing the umpteenth draft of a parent registration or consent form or an evaluation data record when the consensus is that it is finally nearly approximately “perfect”.

... the mixture of hope and frustration when there are more families than can be accommodated knocking on the door, when time and resources are pressed to the limit, and when there are so many more families out there who could use this kind of program.
