

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OF

**ESSO FAMILY MATH
YEAR 1
(2000-2001)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Facilitator Training

During the fall of 2000, approximately 70 individuals, primarily Bachelor of Education students, took part in facilitator training for the Esso Family Math Project. The purpose of the training was to prepare volunteers to facilitate the Family Math Nights planned for the coming year. The training consisted of a one day session on Saturday and two evening sessions the following week. Training was provided for “Early Years” facilitation as well as “2 – 5 Years” facilitation.

At the end of the training sessions, participants completed a questionnaire to provide evaluative feedback. Their responses are summarized below. As well, more detailed feedback on each training session is included in this report (see pages 10 – 14).

The training participants identified many *materials that worked well*. In the Early Years sessions, the activities that were most frequently mentioned revolved around the use of books. In the 2 – 5 Years sessions, participants especially liked the card games, the money game and the tangrams.

The participants also identified *materials that did not work well* although there were fewer of these. In the Early Years sessions, several participants were not keen on the “sparkles and bubbles” activity while others were critical of the “wire and pine cones” activity and the “rag bag” activity. In the 2 – 5 Year sessions, many participants

commented on the bingo chips being too large. Others felt that improvements were needed in the “money game”, the “clock game” and the activity that asks “which letter would you choose”.

When asked for *recommended additions to the training sessions*, several Early Years participants indicated that more “math talk” was needed. Other Early Years participants requested the inclusion of an overview of developmental needs/stages. In the 2 – 5 Years group, participants recommended changes to the timing of the training sessions. They felt the three training sessions were held too close together and not close enough to the actual sessions with families. As well, 2 – 5 Year participants requested that the training include more about the families and their communities.

Training participants also suggested *ways to make Family Math Nights in the community work better*. Individuals in both the Early Years and 2 – 5 Years groups suggested holding a one night “mini session” to generate interest in Family Math and to provide parents with a demonstration of the program. They also mentioned that it would be beneficial to know the number of families as well as a little about the families before sessions start. Training participants also stressed the importance of making the sessions fun and relaxed for families.

The *other comments* offered by Family Math trainees indicated a high level of enthusiasm for the program. As one individual stated, “we should be paying to do this as

you have given us dinner, a booklet of valuable information and the opportunity to work in an alternative teaching setting”.

Family Math Sessions

Esso Family Math Nights were delivered at the following three London area sites during the winter and spring of 2001: Chelsea Green, Glen Cairn and Strathroy. All three sites delivered an Early Years Program and a 2 – 5 Year Program. A total of approximately 60 families took part in the six week programs, attending a Family Math Night one night a week.

In the spring of 2001, group leaders, facilitators and the families themselves provided feedback to the Family Math staff. Their responses are summarized below and, as well, more detailed feedback is included in this report (see pages 15 – 31).

Individual Feedback from those who Facilitated Family Math Sessions

Both Early Years facilitators and 2 – 5 Years facilitators agreed that *the aspect of training they found most helpful* was the opportunity to actually do the activities and discuss their relevance with the trainers. Those who worked with the 2 – 5 Years groups also found that they benefited from the discussions regarding the problems families may encounter.

The facilitators also identified *aspects of training that should be modified*. Again, Early Years facilitators and 2 – 5 Years facilitators gave similar responses, the most frequent

being that the training should be held closer to the delivery of family sessions. Many of the 2 – 5 Years facilitators also indicated that the calculator training should be mandatory.

When asked to identify the *activities that worked the best*, the Early Years facilitators stated that the hands-on activities were most popular as well as the storytelling. In the 2 – 5 Years groups, facilitators found several activities to be highly successful – the card and dice games, “Cross the River”, “Race for a Loonie” and the calculator activities. The *activities that seemed ineffective* included the library activity in the Early Years groups and “How much does it hold?” in the 2 – 5 Years groups.

Facilitators stated that there were several *ways in which the program was satisfying* for them. Many facilitators found it personally rewarding to form relationships with families and professionally rewarding to learn new ways of thinking about math. Several 2 – 5 Years facilitators said that they felt very appreciated by the families and others indicated that they gained satisfaction from simply watching the children have fun with math.

There were some *major frustrations* experienced by the Family Math facilitators. Some of those in the Early Years groups found the lack of organization bothersome. At times there was a shortage of materials, no overall agenda and a lack of familiarity with activities. In the 2 – 5 Years groups, the facilitators’ major frustrations included too few families, and parents answering the questions instead of allowing full participation by the children.

When asked *how they were supported in this program*, many facilitators responded that their group leader, as well as their peers, were very supportive. Several facilitators from the 2 – 5 Years group stated that they also received assistance from university education faculty.

When asked *how this program has helped them grow as teachers*, many Early Years facilitators indicated that they had gained an appreciation of the importance of establishing relationships with parents. The 2 – 5 Years facilitators indicated that the Family Math Program had taught them how to make math fun and applicable to everyday life. They also gained confidence in working with parents. The *advice facilitators would give to someone doing this program next year* includes have fun, enjoy the experience and be a valued member of the Family Math team.

There were many suggested *ideas for making this program better in the future*. These include: design shorter activities; make some curricula connections; address take home activities at the beginning of each night; provide vegetarian meals; and, ensure there is calculator training for all of those involved.

Group Feedback from those who Facilitated Family Math Sessions

Facilitators from the three sites provided group feedback regarding the completed family sessions. In regards to the *adequacy of space*, there appeared to be only one site that experienced any difficulties (i.e., required to move furniture). The *suitability of the six week schedule* was thought to be fine by most facilitators although they liked the option

of a shorter schedule. The *timing of the sessions* was felt to be suitable with the exception that the end time of the sessions was too late for some children. *Having meals with the families* was given a great deal of importance as it provided time to develop relationships. The *activities* were also said to be suitable for most families, however facilitators did find some parents to be less willing to participate. *Other comments* made by facilitators include: provide background information regarding cultures represented at each site; provide babysitting for younger siblings; and, emphasize that parents must stay with their children.

Feedback from those who Lead Family Math Sessions

Group leaders provided *specific suggestions regarding facilitator training*: they want facilitators to have a good understanding of the educational value of each of the family activities; and, they would like facilitators to have access to all needed materials so tote boxes can be ready for use by the end of the training sessions.

The group leaders also provided *specific suggestions regarding family sessions*. These suggestions include: have more math activities and less crafts; take families on library visits; and, provide parents with information on the math value of activities.

Overall suggestions by group leaders include: promote teamwork; provide lead teachers with time off in lieu of their work for Family Math; and, provide childcare for those family members who are not involved in the sessions.

Feedback from Families

Overall, it is evident that families were very satisfied with the Family Math sessions. The majority of parents indicated that they really enjoyed participating in the activities with their children. However, there were some parents from the 2 – 5 Years groups who felt that Family Math was not especially successful in helping them to better understand the math their children do in school nor did it help them feel more comfortable about talking to their children's teachers about math.

When asked *what they liked best about the Family Math sessions*, parents gave many responses. The Early Years families especially liked the fun, hands-on activities while the 2 – 5 Years families liked the games they played in the warm, positive environment.

There were fewer things identified as *what they liked least about the Family Math Sessions*. Some Early Years parents thought the sessions did not allow enough time to complete activities while some 2 - 5 Years parents commented negatively on the choice of food for the meals.

The majority of families indicated that no *changes for future Family Math sessions* are necessary. Some modifications that were suggested include: make the program longer; provide more time for the activities; provide food that young children like; have parents write down what they would like to discuss at the end of the night; and, provide more handouts explaining the value of different games.