

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OF
PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

ESSO FAMILY MATH
Year 2
(2001-2002)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FACILITATOR TRAINING

During the fall of 2001, the Esso Family Math staff delivered two sets of facilitator training sessions. The purpose of the training was to prepare volunteers to facilitate the Family Math programs planned for the coming year. Both sets of training sessions consisted of a one day session on Saturday and an evening session the following Monday. Training was provided for “Early Years” facilitation as well as “2 – 5 Years” facilitation. A total of 109 individuals participated as follows:

<i>Training Type</i>	<i>B.Ed. Students</i>	<i>ECE Students</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>ECE Faculty</i>	<i>Community Reps</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total Participants</i>
<i>Early Years</i>	17	12	4	5	10	4	52
<i>2 – 5 Years</i>	35	1	12		5	4	57
<i>Totals</i>	52	13	16	5	15	8	109

At the end of the training sessions, participants completed a two-page questionnaire to provide evaluative feedback. Their responses are summarized below. See pages 16 – 31 for the actual feedback collected at each training session.

Most students indicated that their reason for attending the training was to either gain experience working with families or to participate in a program that would help them become more effective educators. Teachers also reported that they wanted an opportunity to work with families and to improve their own practice by learning new ways to help children with mathematics. Most community representatives attended the training because they want to help families better understand how they can help their children.

Overall, the training was very well received with 60 participants reporting that the training met their expectations and 42 participants reporting that the training exceeded their expectations. These participants commented on how well the training was organized, the expertise and enthusiasm of the trainers, the relaxed hands-on approach and the provision of excellent resources and materials. Only four individuals indicated that the training failed to meet their expectations. They would have preferred less hands-on activities, more focus on theory and more information on how to work with families.

While participants reported many helpful aspects of the training, the hands-on approach and the excellent resources /materials were mentioned most frequently. There were fewer aspects of training that were noted as needing change. The most frequently recommended changes were to shorten the instruction time and to reduce the number of Family Math activities that must be reviewed during the training.

The Family Math activities received high praise from almost all participants. They were described as fun, easy-to-follow activities that make great use of everyday materials. Participants appreciated the attention to developmental appropriateness and cultural issues.

The large majority of participants (87%) reported that after attending the two days of training they felt prepared to facilitate Family Math sessions. When asked what would help them feel even more prepared, they responded that they would have liked more time to organize tasks within their group and they would also have benefited from more discussion on how to work with at-risk families. Several participants expressed a desire to visit a site and observe a Family Math session.

The overall success of the training was evident from the participants' additional comments made at the end of the questionnaires. These comments were overwhelmingly favorable in terms of both the Family Math Program and the facilitator training. Another indicator of the participants' enthusiasm in the project is the large number of individuals who volunteered either to be involved in further research activities (72) or to keep a journal for research purposes during their participation (18).

FAMILY SESSIONS

During the 2001-2002 school year, the Esso Family Math Program was offered at four London locations as well as at sites in Ingersoll, Tilsonburg, Wallaceburg and

Woodstock. All but one site delivered the Early Years Program while a total of five sites delivered the 2 - 5 Years Program. A total of approximately 90 families (including over 120 children) took part in the sessions, attending a Family Math session one night a week, usually for six weeks. Across all eight sites, program delivery was the responsibility of 18 leaders and approximately 70 volunteer facilitators.

Leader and Facilitator Feedback

Throughout the fall and winter, feedback on the family sessions was collected from both leaders and facilitators. On the final night of the program at each site, the leader and the facilitators completed an individual questionnaire regarding their experiences. As well, together, they completed a questionnaire that encouraged discussion of the overall effectiveness of their program. One or two individuals at each site volunteered to keep journals throughout the time they were involved in the project. The data collected is detailed on pages 32 – 58 and summarized below.

Leaders

During the year, the eighteen program leaders, most of whom have a teaching background, attended the Esso Family Math training sessions and then lead a Family Math group for the very first time. They reported that the training they received prepared them well for this new experience.

Most leaders indicated that they shared their leadership responsibilities with the student facilitators. The leaders reported that the facilitators played a crucial role in the success of

the program as they displayed an “excellent level of commitment and enthusiasm” and were able to give families “individual attention and feedback”.

The leaders suggested some changes in regards to program delivery. Several Early Years leaders indicated that the program be shortened to three or four weeks. They also stated that discipline issues need to be addressed as there have been children whose behavior has disrupted the rest of the group. The 2 – 5 Years leaders suggested some changes to particular activities as well as a reduction in the number of activities completed each evening.

Overall, the program leaders described their Family Math experiences as “very positive” and “gratifying”. Many leaders plan to use their Family Math facilitation skills in their own classrooms within the school system.

Facilitators

A total of 55 facilitators, all participating in Family Math for the first time, completed questionnaires. The large majority of these individuals (78%) were attending a university education program at the time. All but one facilitator attended the Esso Family Math training sessions.

The facilitators spoke positively about the training they received prior to their participation in family sessions. However, many facilitators commented that it would have been more effective to hold the training sessions closer to the time of program

delivery. As well, several facilitators in both the Early Years Program and the 2 – 5 Years Program, indicated that one day of training would have been sufficient.

It was apparent that the facilitators filled many roles in the delivery of the Family Math Program. Their primary responsibilities included: organizing meals, preparing activities, leading activities, working one-on-one with families, collecting research data and cleaning up the facility once the session ended. The facilitators reported overwhelmingly that this was a positive learning experience for them. As one facilitator stated, “it was great because families enjoyed the program and leading the group was a great confidence builder for me”.

When asked about the role their leader played in program delivery, most facilitators responded with great enthusiasm. While one leader was described as “doing the bare minimum”, others were described as “amazing”, “well-organized”, “helpful and patient” and “flexible”. It was very apparent that the facilitators, especially those training to become teachers, appreciated the opportunity to work with leaders who were excellent mentors.

The facilitators suggested several changes that may improve future Family Math programs. The most frequently suggested changes for the Early Years component was to reduce the number of stories that are read, and to also reduce the number of family sessions in each program. The 2 – 5 Years facilitators suggested that the number of activities per session should be reduced.

Overall, the facilitators described their Family Math experiences as “fun” and “rewarding” and as one facilitator stated, “it was an excellent opportunity to learn about

this age group and about how to relate math to real life”. Many facilitators plan to use their Family Math facilitation skills in their own classrooms once they begin their teaching careers.

Group

Together, the leader and facilitators of each Family Math group discussed the overall effectiveness of their program and completed a group feedback questionnaire. At some sites, there appeared to be some confusion regarding who should complete these questionnaires and, as a result, the questionnaires were completed by individuals rather than by the entire group. Despite this problem, the questionnaires reveal some important feedback.

When asked how families responded to their program, all groups indicated that families participated enthusiastically in Family Math activities. However, the sessions did not necessarily proceed as expected. At Early Years sites, some families brought siblings who were not old enough to participate in the activities. As well, there were behavioral problems. At 2 – 5 Years sites, where leaders and facilitators tried to follow the activities outlined in the resource book, the time frames were often too tight. Consequently, activities were sometimes rushed.

The groups reported many activities that worked well, in addition to several activities that need change. Both Early Years sites and 2 – 5 Years sites incorporated new activities into their programs.

When asked to rate different aspects of the family sessions, the 2 – 5 Years sites indicated that the locations, the meals and the support from the Family Math staff and the community was either good or excellent. At Early Years sites, there were some concerns about the content of the meals and the external support they received.

Parent Feedback

Feedback was also collected from the parents and/or guardians who attended the Family Math sessions with their children. Assisted by a facilitator, parents completed two questionnaires and a family information sheet. Participation in this research was entirely voluntary. The data collected is detailed on pages 59 – 79 and summarized below.

Questionnaires were completed as follows:

Questionnaire Type	No. Completed	
	Early Years	2 – 5 Years
Comments Before Sessions Began	51	29
Comments After Last Session	40	31
Family Information	48	35

Early Years

The majority of Early Years parents (81%) indicated that their children live in a two-parent home. English is a second language for some families (22%). The mothers’

education levels were reported to be relatively high with all but five mothers completing high school. Forty-six percent of the mothers have also completed college or university. Similarly, seventy-three percent of the fathers have completed high school with thirty-four percent also completing college or university. Only ten fathers participated in the Family Math sessions.

While some parents reported liking math in school, many others stated that they found math “difficult” and “frustrating”. They decided to attend the Family Math sessions to help their children with math, and in some cases, to ensure that their children do not have the “same frustrations with math” that they had. When asked how they use math in their daily life, most parents indicated that they use math at work and/or at home when taking care of the household finances. All but two parents reported that they do math activities with their children at home, mostly involving counting. While almost all of the parents said that they are comfortable talking to their children’s teachers, several parents indicated that they are “scared”, “uneasy” and “a little intimidated” about helping their children with homework.

After attending the Esso Family Math sessions, the Early Years parents were very willing to share their opinions of the program. All parents had positive comments about their experiences. They especially enjoyed interacting with their children and participating in the math activities together. When asked if they would change anything about Family Math, thirty-five percent of the parents stated they would not change anything. Others

suggested that the number of stories should be reduced and the number of hands-on activities should be increased.

Many parents indicated that they are now using the Family Math activities at home. Some parents also reported that they feel “much better” about helping their children with math homework. One parent said that she feels “much more comfortable” helping with homework and has used “a few things she learned in Family Math to help explain a problem”. She remarked that she can “even learn some of this new math” herself.

Another parent also commented that she feels much more at ease when talking to teachers as she now understands more of the new terminology used on report cards.

Many of the Early Years parents were eager to share their new thoughts about math. They realize that “math can be fun” and they are also “more aware of everything that requires math”. As one parent summarized, “I wish I had had Family Math Nights when I was in school...I may have done better in math and felt much more comfortable using math...”.

2 – 5 Years

The majority of 2 - 5 Years parents (86%) indicated that their children live in a two-parent home. English is a second language for some families (26%). The mothers’ education levels were reported to be relatively high with all but six mothers completing high school. Forty-three percent of the mothers have also completed college or university. Similarly, eighty-four percent of the fathers have completed high school with fifty-nine

percent also completing college or university. Only eight fathers participated in the Family Math sessions.

While a few parents reported liking math in school, many others stated that they found math “difficult” and “not pleasant”. They decided to attend the Family Math sessions to spend time with their children and to learn ways to help their children with math. When asked how they use math in their daily life, most parents indicated that they use math at work and/or at home when taking care of the household finances. One parent said she just “tries to avoid it”. All but one parent reported that they do math activities with their children at home, mostly involving homework. While almost all of the parents said that they are comfortable talking to their children’s teachers, a few parents indicated that they become frustrated when helping their children with homework. One parent said, “I cannot do it...I can get the answer but my child has a different way of finding the right answer”.

After attending the Esso Family Math sessions, the 2 - 5 Years parents were very willing to share their opinions of the program. All parents had positive comments about their experiences. They especially enjoyed the games, the calculator activities and estimating. When asked if they would change anything about Family Math, forty-two percent of the parents stated they would not change anything and sixteen percent stated they would increase the number of sessions.

Many parents indicated that they are now using the Family Math games, especially the estimating activity, at home. Some parents also reported that they feel “not quite as frustrated” about helping their children with math homework. One parent said that “lately helping my child with math has been fun”.

Many of the 2 - 5 Years parents shared their new thoughts about math. They realize that “math can be fun” and “it is not all doom, despair and agony”. As one parent concluded, “I am so impressed with this program and the fact that I see math in a new light...the kids and I realize that math is all around us”.