

The Evolution of a Title:

The "Canadian Parenting Workshops" have evolved from a program that was originally written for and piloted with Spanish-speaking parents. The first version of the workshops was entitled "Immigrant Families: Helping Children Succeed in School." That draft was piloted, evaluated, and revised and the title was changed to the more inclusive "Newcomer Families: Helping Children Succeed in School." That draft was also piloted and evaluated. The evaluations completed by Beth Hoen were of these earlier versions of the workshops. The present iteration of the workshops retains the strengths and addresses the weaknesses of the earlier versions.

NEWCOMER FAMILIES: Helping Children Succeed in School

Final Evaluation Report

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**for
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October 2003

Acknowledgements

This project has involved extensive coordination and intensive collaboration. As the external evaluator, I want to express my appreciation to everyone who helped make the evaluation possible:

The mothers participating in Newcomer Families groups—for your time, energy and forthright comments about Newcomer Families

Those implementing the curriculum: Irene Altimera, Jose Arellano, Luz Bascunan, Marcelo de Castro, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Gloria Roque, Fatima Tejerina and Tanya Pinto-Velez—for your efforts and skill in conducting and presenting in the groups; and your diligence in compiling information, answering question after question and completing form after form

Host agencies: Yorktown Child and Family Centre, Toronto; Ecole St. Jean Baptiste, Montreal; Kiwasa Neighbourhood House, Vancouver; Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre, Toronto—for welcoming Newcomer Families and providing hospitable settings and support for the delivery of the program

Research Coordinators: Marcelo de Castro, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Diana Wilches—for arranging, managing and coordinating all the bits and pieces and tracking the paper flow, with a positive “can do” attitude

Data Analyst: John FitzGerald—for your thorough statistical analysis and advice on interpretation, and your good humour throughout

Providers of academic input to the curriculum: Judith Bernhard, Marlinda Freire and Vicki Mulligan—for your work and research with newcomer families and young children in general and for your conceptual guidance and skilful blending of information to craft a curriculum in keeping with adult education principles

The Advisory Committee: Nuri Rugeles, Daniel Gana, Rodolfo Arenas—for your expertise, contributions and guidance in the curriculum and the evaluation, and

Human Resources Development Canada—for your generous financial support, without which the development and testing of Newcomer Families would not have been possible!

Thank you, everyone!

Beth Hoen,
Evaluation Consultant

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1. Introduction

The program, Newcomer Families: Helping Children Succeed in School (NF)¹, was initiated as part of a research project, Supporting Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Settings. This project is grounded in ongoing research focusing on the difficulties of Latin American children and families in schools.

The program was developed to help families who are newcomers to Canada to promote their children's development and success in school and to improve their understanding of and relationships with Canadian education and social service systems. A Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) grant supported the program development, evaluation and dissemination during the period September 2001—December 2003.

The program was originally structured as a 10-week curriculum for mothers in newcomer families with children from ages four to eight. It was implemented in community-based settings in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto in the fall of 2002: a Montreal elementary school, a Toronto child and family centre (children's mental health service) and a Vancouver neighbourhood centre. In late spring 2003, the curriculum was modified to focus on parents with younger children and NF was offered at a Toronto family resource program. This draft reports on the findings resulting from the evaluation of the three fall 2002 groups and the spring 2003 group. It does not include activity following the delivery of the NF groups.

1.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to determine how the curriculum was implemented, how it worked and whether it was effective in achieving the expected short-term outcomes.

The primary evaluation questions were:

- Who attended the program? What were the participants' characteristics?
- How did participants benefit?
- How was the program implemented? What changes were made during implementation?
- How effective was the curriculum in achieving the expected short-term outcomes?
- How can the program be improved?

¹ The program was originally titled "Immigrant Families: Helping Children Succeed in School." In the spring of 2003, the name was changed to "Newcomer Families: Helping Children Succeed in School" to be more inclusive of immigrants, refugees and newcomers whose status is not yet established.

1.2 Evolution of Newcomer Families

The NF program includes the following broad topics: social support networks; child development; school readiness and success; communication, relationships and rights vis a vis child care, school and social services systems. For further detail about the background research that led to the development of the program and the Newcomer Families curriculum, see the Reference List.

Following the implementation and evaluation of the fall 2002 groups, the curriculum maintained these broad areas and was revised with the following primary changes:

- The primary message of the program was clarified, that is: parents can have an impact on their children's socio-emotional development and school experience—they have something very worthwhile to contribute to their children's education.
- The curriculum content and topics were streamlined to emphasize the primary messages and to reduce the time required to cover topics necessary to get this message across.
- The content was modified to test its relevance and effectiveness with mothers who have younger children and little or no experience with the school system.
- Curriculum activities were changed to reflect the fall 2002 experience related to the success of individual activities and to address the time constraints.

Specific changes for each topic area are identified in section 3.1.3, Curriculum Topics and Order.

1.3 Organization of this Report

The report is organized as follows:

- Approach and methodology
- Findings, including those about the curriculum itself, the participant families, and participants' outcomes and benefits
- Conclusions, and
- Recommendations.

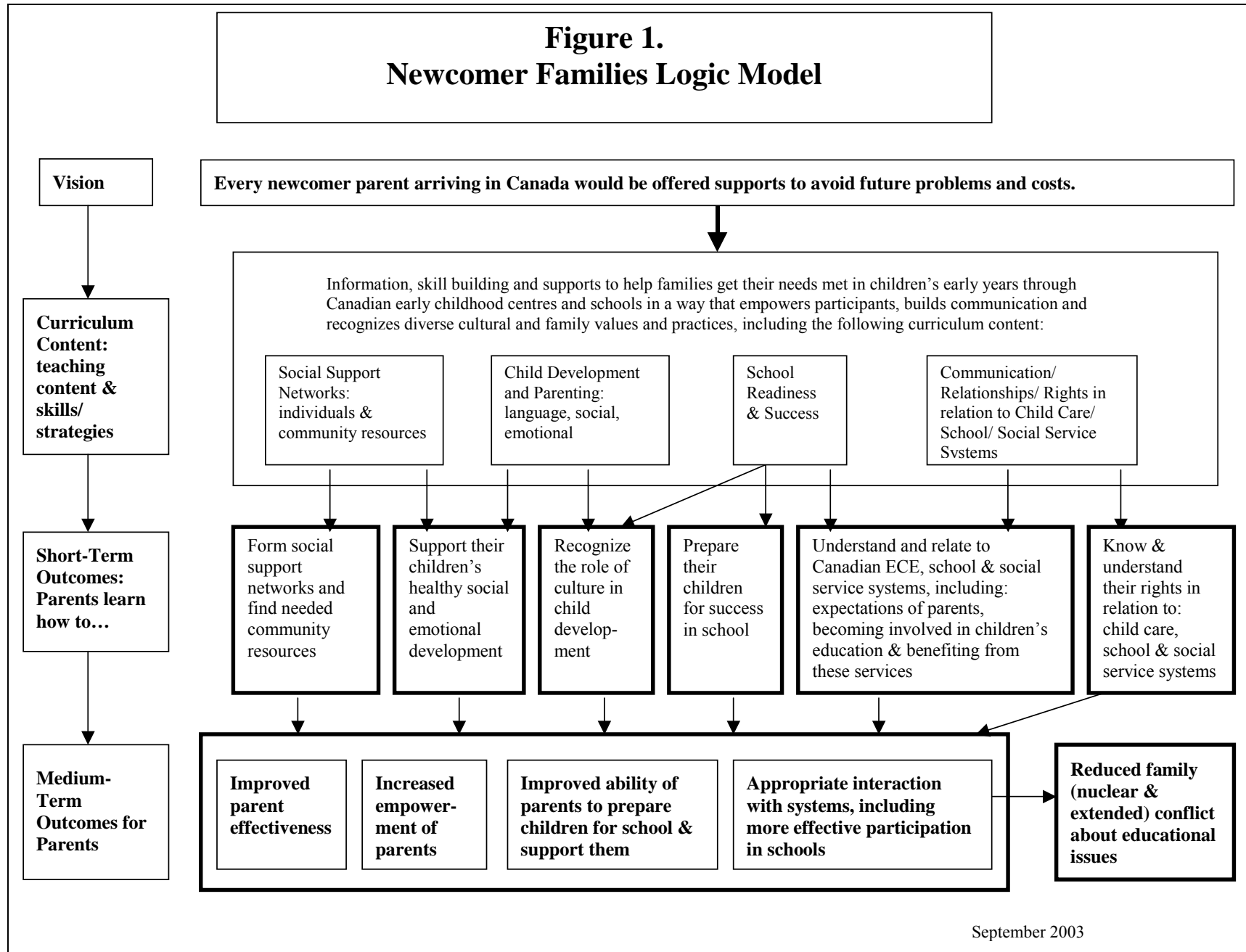
2. Approach and Methodology

2.1 Overall Approach and Logic Model

Planning for the evaluation was initiated using a program logic model to clarify the relationships of the broad topic areas of the curriculum to the vision of the program and the short- and medium-term expected outcomes. The logic model was revised in the spring of 2003 based on evaluation results from the fall groups (see Figure 1). The primary changes were a streamlining and focussing of the curriculum content about child development to focus more on language,

social and emotional development and, for the short-term outcomes, a shift to a skill learning focus rather than simply understanding in relation to children's development, school readiness and relationships with schools and service systems.

**Figure 1.
Newcomer Families Logic Model**



2.2 Method, Sources and Tools for Information Collection

Newcomer Families was a new curriculum under development. To identify what was working well and what needed to be improved, the information collection was fairly intensive. The sources of information were the participants and the program facilitators. Information gathering methods included surveys, focus groups and process record keeping.

2.2.1 Information Collected

The information collected about outcomes and benefits included:

- parental attitudes, knowledge and behaviour related to children's development and the Canadian education, child care and social service systems
- social support
- perceived benefits of the program for participants
- facilitators' perceptions of participant involvement, outcomes and benefits from the program.

The information about the curriculum process and the participants included:

- demographic information to describe participant mothers and their families (e.g., ages, number of children, country of birth, time in Canada, ease of speaking English or French, income, support in raising children)
- participants' satisfaction with the program
- group facilitators' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, its implementation and how it can be improved.

2.2.2 Methods, Instruments and Procedures

The following instruments were used to collect information from participants in each of the fall and spring groups. All these participant instruments were administered in Spanish, and the responses translated into English for analysis and reporting (see Appendix for the final versions of these instruments):

- Written post-program questionnaire "Survey for Parents":
 - Fall 2002: the post program survey included multiple-choice, scaled response questions and some open-ended questions. (A pre-post questionnaire was considered and rejected due to the perception that participants might experience these questions as intrusive at the beginning of the program. As well, the curriculum designers were concerned about the time that would have been taken from the program itself.)
 - Spring 2003: a pre-post survey was used covering the same content as the fall post-program survey.

- Parent group interview at end of the program
- Four to five brief individual interviews for each group at Session 6 or 7 (fall 2002 only)
- Questions requesting feedback from participants at end of each session: for example, What did you get out of session today? What did you like most? Least? How can the curriculum for this topic be improved?

To document the implementation of the curriculum, facilitators completed the following:

- Session debriefing: program activities, discussions, homework, assessment of how well topics were covered, level of activity of the discussion and homework completion
- Questionnaires at the mid-point and the end of the curriculum about what worked well and how implementation was going
- Group teleconference interview following the last session
- Record of attendance by individual participants
- Record of reminders and incentives used to promote attendance and gather information, and contacts to plan and deliver sessions.

In effect, the facilitators became researchers as a result of their important responsibility for information collection. This provided them the opportunity to reflect on their experience and consider adjustments to NF as they were delivering the program.

A note about the use of statistical testing for the pre-post analysis of data from the spring 2003 group: Statistical testing with small numbers was conducted recognizing that the conclusions to be drawn were about a small group—that is, the question was whether a difference in the pre-post responses of a group of 15 participants was due to an actual change or to chance. The statistical tests used (for example, t-tests) account for the sample size by controlling for the number of respondents: the smaller the number in the group, the larger the difference must be to detect real change. Thus, the methods used to detect the differences for the spring 2003 group are as rigorous as possible using appropriate statistical methods.

To determine whether income, education or ease of speaking English was a factor in participants' responses about NF, statistical analyses were conducted as appropriate. Only statistically significant results are reported.

2.2.3 Limitations

The following limitations are important context for critical examination of the evaluation findings and conclusions:

- The evaluation of the fall and spring groups of Newcomer Families had a very practical purpose. It was intended to contribute to the development and ongoing improvement of the curriculum so that it would have the most positive results for the mothers who participated and become a replicable program that could be used in other settings. The combination of

process and outcome evaluation was designed to feed back information during and at the end of the groups to enable adjustment of the curriculum. The evaluation tracked the changes facilitators and curriculum designers made based on their judgement and participants' responses and desires. Changes to the curriculum, plus the individuality of facilitators and participants and the group dynamics, all likely affected outcomes for participants. Thus the curriculum evaluated was a dynamic and organic program, not a static intervention. The evaluation reported here reflects this dynamic program.

- Differences between the fall and spring evaluation designs affected comparability. The two designs were post-program information collection in the fall and pre-post in the spring. On the other hand, these different designs did not interfere substantially with the primary purpose of the evaluation—to understand how the curriculum worked, improve it and identify benefits and outcomes.
- The evaluation considered factors that might have an impact on results, for example, participant children's ages, their school experience and the time available to cover current topics. A number of other factors that may have affected the implementation and participants' outcomes and benefits were not accounted for in the evaluation, for example, participants' different countries of birth and cultures; facilitators' different skills, experience and styles; and the host settings. Differences in implementation in different locations and settings may have affected how effectively the curriculum be could implemented and how well it worked, such as physical differences in the rooms in which the program was delivered, the type of space and furniture available (for example classrooms vs lounge-type settings) and proximity of the child care provided.
- Information collection was affected by poor recording equipment in some cases; this was remedied over time. Translations of written comments on surveys and end of session questionnaires were sometimes difficult due to differences in the usage and meaning of Spanish words across different Latin American countries and communities.

3. Findings

This section reports the findings from all information collection. It is organized as follows:

- Discussion of the curriculum and changes made between the fall and spring program delivery
- Description of the participant mothers, their families and their involvement in NF
- Presentation of findings about outcomes and the program in relation to the each of the primary curriculum topics, from the participants' and facilitators' perspectives.

The results for the fall 2002 and spring 2003 groups are presented separately within each section.

3.1 Curriculum Content and Changes

This section reports on the process evaluation findings that led to the changes in the curriculum during and between the fall and spring groups. The facilitators' experience of the curriculum is presented, followed by a summary of the changes implemented for the spring group.

3.1.1 Facilitators' Experience of the Curriculum

3.1.1.1 Fall 2002 Groups

For the fall groups, the three facilitators were provided a two-day training session in Toronto in July 2002. Facilitators had received drafts of the curriculum prior to the training. They were all experienced group leaders in other services for families, especially for groups of mothers. All spoke Spanish as their first language. The session included an introduction to the administrative and evaluation information collection requirements as well as an opportunity to provide feedback on the curriculum. The program in Toronto was started in September 2002, with the other two locations commencing in October.

Facilitators generally felt very well prepared to implement the curriculum (all rated 6 or 7 on a scale of 1 to 7 in which 7 was "very well"). However, some felt that more specific training would be helpful, especially focusing on group dynamics, specifically dealing with group conflict. It would also be useful to clarify the skills needed by facilitators so that future users of the curriculum could assess their needs for training.

Facilitators found the curriculum and related materials relatively easy to use (two locations rated 2 in which 1 = "very easy" and 7 = "difficult"). An important exception was that the Toronto facilitators, the first ones to deliver the program, found it necessary to translate the curriculum into Spanish before conducting the sessions; thus, they rated the ease of use much lower (4). The Vancouver and Montreal facilitators used this translation in their delivery of the curriculum. Facilitators found the presentation of information, facilitating discussion and explaining homework "easy" (rated 1 or 2).

In two locations, the facilitators found the set-up somewhat onerous and more time consuming than expected (rated 3 and 5). The facilitator in the other location noted that it was easy because of past experience with this type of program.

The program was very appropriate for program participants (rated 6 or 7 in which 7 was "very suitable"), according to all the facilitators. They agreed it was "very suitable" for mothers with children ages six to eight and "suitable" for those with four- to five-year-old children. However, they had diverse views about its appropriateness for younger children. While they recognized that all parents will need the school-related information at some point, there was a difference of opinion about the curriculum's relevance to parents whose children are not yet in school.

The locations for these groups included an elementary school, neighbourhood centre and children's mental health centre. There was no evidence that these different contexts affected how the curriculum was implemented, that is, neither facilitators nor participants commented about the host settings. In addition to the physical facilities, the groups received a range of supports from their host settings that were necessary to deliver the program, including: provision

of resource information by host setting staff, child care facilities, and office and photocopying services.

3.1.1.2 Spring 2003 Group

The spring group was co-facilitated by a staff member at a multi-service neighbourhood centre and the research coordinator for the Newcomer Families project. The neighbourhood centre staff had experience working with mothers from diverse cultures in their family resource centre. The coordinator had not facilitated a group before but was knowledgeable about the program curriculum and administrative and evaluation requirements because he had been involved in the later part of the Toronto fall group.

Three days of training were provided covering the overall project, the administrative and evaluation procedures and the curriculum content. In addition to the training content provided prior to the fall 2002 groups, more information was included about the project background, overall rationale and theoretical approach, and participatory group techniques and action research.

The facilitators completed the debriefing and other forms together. They felt well prepared (rated 6 of 7 where 7 was “very well”). Having co-facilitators with relevant experience and working well together were cited as some of the reasons for feeling well prepared.

The facilitators found the curriculum and related materials overall relatively easy to use (rated 2 of 7, where 1 was “easy”) except for the need to translate them. Although the original curriculum had been translated, that translation was in point form and much of the curriculum had changed. The facilitators needed to have the revised detailed curriculum in Spanish, in order to feel comfortable in delivering the program.

The spring facilitators specifically rated the presentation of information, facilitating discussion and explaining homework “easy” (2 of 7). However, they reported that the set-up was somewhat onerous (rated 6 of 7, where 7 was “difficult”). The need for translation was the reason given. Likewise, the facilitators reported that making use of written curriculum materials was not easy (rated 4, halfway between “easy” and “difficult”) because they had to translate the materials.

Facilitators thought the program was quite appropriate overall for their participants (rated 7 in which 7 was “very suitable”). They agreed it was “suitable” for participants with children ages three and under (rated 6 of 7), and “very suitable” for those with children ages four to five and six to eight (rated 7).

The facilitators commented positively on the cultural appropriateness of the curriculum and further tailored it to their group:

[The curriculum] was targeted to Latin American families and it was culturally appropriate.... Topics and activities were programmed appropriately.... A display of books, toys and resources was made; mothers were asked to share songs and stories they learned as a child.

The multi-service neighbourhood centre hosting the spring group included the program as part of its family resource centre program. The settlement worker at the neighbourhood centre provided

resources to share with the group. In describing the neighbourhood centre's rationale for hosting NF, the manager for children's and early years services explained that the program was consistent with their client groups' need for information about Canadian education and child rearing, and with the agency's values of participating in research. She also commented on benefits to staff in providing a professional development experience. The centre plans to use some of the content and materials on an ongoing basis. The manager noted that a manual would be most welcome and that the program would also be relevant for other newcomer groups served by the neighbourhood centre.

3.1.2 Program Delivery

3.1.2.1 Time/Length of Sessions

Sessions varied in length among the locations from an average of about 1.5 to 2.75 hours, although most were originally planned for one and one-half hours. Total program time varied from about 17 hours to nearly 25 hours. Programs with fewer participants had shorter times. Most participants and the facilitators identified that there was not enough time to cover all topics well and to discuss them adequately.

After the experience with the fall groups, the spring sessions were planned for 2 to 2.5 hours. This appeared to work better, with fewer comments from facilitators and participants about the time being too limited. Sessions for parents who are attending between their children's school drop-off and pick-up times (i.e., for children in kindergarten) may need to be shorter to accommodate their needs; an additional session or two could be considered for these groups.

3.1.2.2 Activities, Materials, Handouts and Homework

Participants reported liking particular activities and handouts, but both participants and facilitators suggested seeking additional culturally appropriate videos, films, other visual aids and handouts, especially regarding child development and relationships with schools.

Some participants were very happy to engage in the homework; others felt they did not have time or wondered about the rationale. Participants' involvement in these take-home activities varied among the locations and by specific activity. The most popular activities were playing childhood games, singing and reading to children; finding local resources; and interacting with and/or visiting school.

For the future, the popular activities could be maintained since those are the ones that engage and are meaningful to participants, that is, they are more likely to be done. More culturally appropriate materials, including audio-visual resources and written materials, need to be sought or developed.

3.1.2.3 Other factors

A number of other factors affected the delivery of the program:

- Translation of the curriculum: facilitators needed the curriculum in Spanish before effectively delivering the information.
- Facilitator knowledge, skills and experience in leading groups: specific skills were not prescribed prior to the development and delivery of NF. The facilitators had different types of group work experience and all brought knowledge of and experience in working with Latin American families.
- Facilitator time: Extensive time was required for facilitators to prepare for the groups, set up materials and the group room and close down, as well as contacts with participants between sessions, arranging guest speakers and field visits.
- Child care time: The experience of facilitators was that child care needed to be provided at least 15 minutes before groups started so that mothers could settle their children before the group was to begin. Lack of this time meant that groups were delayed in starting or some mothers came into the group sessions late.
- Logistics: Host settings provided important logistical supports in the form of the meeting room, flip charts, overhead projectors, child care supplies and equipment, photocopying and other office services, etc. These varied among the sites.

3.1.2.4 Future/Follow up to these Groups

All locations are working or considering on further action to support newcomer parents, including ongoing support groups, a School Welcome Group and communicating with the school board. In Vancouver a subsequent group was formed including members of the first group, and a committee continued to work with the school board on newcomer family services.

3.1.3 Curriculum Topics and Order

During the fall, all topics were covered in some form in all three locations. Curriculum developers and facilitators made a number of changes during and between the fall 2002 and spring 2003 groups to streamline and focus the curriculum and improve implementation. These curriculum issues and related changes are summarized below.

- **Participants' overwhelming interest in Canadian education systems and school readiness:**

Given the participants' eagerness to learn more about Canadian education systems, the facilitators for the fall groups believed that it would be better to move directly from Session 4 (language development and school readiness) to a focus on school relationships and structures, rather than the planned focus of Session 5 which was on children's social development and peer relationships. As a result, the Toronto facilitators reorganized the curriculum topics so that the school information started in Session 5 and social development and guidance techniques came later in the curriculum. This order was used in Vancouver. In Montreal, the school-related topics were started even earlier, in Session 3. This change set

the stage for the spring revision to the curriculum in which school readiness was discussed in Session 4 and school relationships and structures were introduced in Session 5.

- **Too much material for limited time:**

A prevalent theme from the facilitators in the fall groups was that there was not enough time for the discussion of essential topics. In the fall some subjects were not well covered because of lack of time, for example, Influencing Decisions made by schools and the education system, Bias and Racism, and Helping Children Deal with Difficult Peers. One or more groups felt discussion time was too limited for Immigration and Parenting, Report Cards, Interpreters, Children’s Homework, Special Education, Physical Punishment and Child Protection.

Several changes were made to address this limitation. The curriculum was streamlined and some activities for some topics were reduced. A major change from fall 2002 to spring 2003 was narrowing the focus of child development to social, emotional and language development, including independence and self-control. Other topics that were less well covered were better integrated with primary topics to ensure they were touched on rather than attempting to cover them in depth. As noted, the amount of time per session was increased from the expected 1.5-2 hours in the fall to 2-2.5 hours in the spring. In the spring, the topics not covered or not well covered were: Special Education, Children’s Homework, Experience with Bias and Helping Children with Difficult Peers.

- **Shift in target group:**

The fall groups targeted mothers of children age four to eight. The facilitators assessed the curriculum as very appropriate for these age groups, but less appropriate for mothers of younger children. For the spring group, the curriculum was modified to account for mothers’ inexperience with the school system: a field visit to a school kindergarten was added to provide parents with first hand experience with a school classroom and teacher; the time devoted to school structures and policies (including report cards and homework) was reduced; and Special Education as a separate topic was deleted.

- **Need for basic information about Canadian governments:**

The spring group expressed interest in the roles of the various levels of governments in Canada and their rights and responsibilities as citizens. This topic was important for them to better understand school structures and relationships. A brief lesson on “civics” was added in Session 7.

The primary changes from the original curriculum are reflected in Table 1. It lists the original planned curriculum for the fall 2002, the revised curriculum for the spring 2003, and adjustments made as the spring curriculum was implemented.

Table 1. Summary of Curriculum and Changes Over Time

Original Curriculum planned for Fall 2002 Groups	Curriculum used in Spring 2003 Groups	Spring 2003 Implementation
Session 1:	Session 1:	Implemented as planned

Original Curriculum planned for Fall 2002 Groups	Curriculum used in Spring 2003 Groups	Spring 2003 Implementation
<p>Introductions & purpose of project Circle technique, model mother and Hopes, Wishes, Dreams Opportunities for participants to get to know one another Provision of parenting information</p>	<p>Clarify purposes and Introductions Introduce ground rules Introduce circle technique Mothers' hopes/dreams/wishes for children</p>	
<p>Session 2: Support Networks & Stress Immigration & Parenting Bias & Racism Child Care Arrangements Description of Their Parenting Practices by Participants Sources of Community Support</p>	<p>Session 2: Support Networks (including informal and formal supports) Immigration and Adaptation Impacts of Immigration on Parenting</p>	<p>Implemented as planned</p>
<p>Session 3: Child Development and Promoting Development: brain, cognitive, language social; milestones Strategies to Promote Development</p>	<p>Session 3: Attachment—what it is and how to support it Promoting Children's Social Development Self-control as Preparation for School Independence and Interdependence</p>	<p>Implemented as planned</p>
<p>Session 4: Strategies to Promote Language Development & School Readiness, Play; Preparing Children for Success Teacher Expectations Expectation of Parental Involvement in School Bilingualism; Children speaking Spanish Translation Services</p>	<p>Session 4: School Readiness – Teachers' Strategies for Supporting Readiness for School Play as Preparation for Success in School Language and School Readiness</p>	<p>Implemented as planned</p>
<p>Sessions 5: Social Development & Peer Relationships Attachment Self-control Sons & Daughters</p>	<p>Session 5: Parental Involvement is an Expectation Building Relationships with Schools Improving the Responsiveness of Schools Things School Personnel need to Know</p>	<p>Implemented as planned, except that time for Improving the Responsiveness of Schools was too limited</p>
<p>Session 6: Behaviour, Guidance Techniques, Developmentally Appropriate Approaches Educators' Perspectives on Unacceptable Behaviour Helping Children Resolve Differences with Peers & Respond to Negative Behaviours Influencing Family Members' Guidance</p>	<p>Session 6: Overview of School Systems Ontario Curriculum and Teaching Methods Gender Issues Children's Homework</p>	<p>Implemented Overview of School Systems and Ontario Curriculum Added School Communication planned for Session 8; Postponed Gender Issues and Children's Homework</p>

Original Curriculum planned for Fall 2002 Groups	Curriculum used in Spring 2003 Groups	Spring 2003 Implementation
Techniques		
Sessions 7: Discipline by Parents and in Schools School Structure Special Education	Session 7: Field Trip to Kindergarten Class (See S. 8)	Postponed: Field trip to Session 8 Added: Overview of Levels of Government and Elections Covered: Gender Issues (from Session 6), School Behaviour policies and Teachers' Perspectives on Misbehaviour (planned for Session 8)
Session 8: Mothers' Perceptions of School Discipline Relationships with Schools Report Cards Child Protection Street Proofing	Session 8: School Communications School Behaviour Policies Teachers' Perspectives on Misbehaviour Experiences with Bias	Field Trip (all topics planned for Session 8 were covered in Sessions 6 & 7, except Experience with Bias)
Session 9: Building Relationships with Schools & Child Care Personnel Homework Parent Participation, Mechanisms for Influencing Decisions at School	Session 9: Responding to Misbehaviour at Home Children's Rights and Child Protection Helping Children Get Along with Peers Survey	Implemented as planned, except Helping Children Get Along with Peers
Session 10: Opportunity for Questions Focus Group with Parent Wrap-up	Session 10: Opportunity for participants to ask questions, express concerns, share stories Wrap-up and Closure	Implemented as planned

3.1.4 Summary and Discussion

Facilitators in the fall made changes necessary to enhance the curriculum's relevance and appropriateness for families with young school-aged children, bringing forward information about school-parent relationships and school structures. The curriculum designers incorporated these changes and streamlined the criteria for the spring group, in addition to modifying it for mothers with preschool-aged children.

Issues arising during the spring implementation that still need to be addressed are: limited time for the topics Improving the Responsiveness of Schools, Experience with Bias and Helping Children Deal with Peers, and determination of whether Overview of Levels of Government and Elections should be a permanent topic for the curriculum. Special Education and Children's Report Cards were not as well covered in the spring due to the younger target group; including

them for the older children requires some revision to the curriculum to meet a broader range of needs.

Future implementations need to ensure that the curriculum is translated into the language of delivery; facilitators have the skills, training and support needed; the logistical supports and the time allocated for the facilitators and child care is adequate.

3.2 Participant Families

This section describes participant families and their involvement in NF.

In general, the mothers and their families come from a variety of Latin American countries and most have been in Canada for less than five years. Most have one to three children under the age of eight. Most also have limited facility in English or French, the language in which their children are being educated. Overall, a higher proportion of the parents have post-secondary education than the Canadian population, but most families have incomes below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut Off. Most mothers attended NF very regularly, participated actively and were very satisfied with their involvement in NF.

The information about participants and their families reported below was retrieved from the program registration forms completed by participants, attendance records and interviews with the facilitators and participants. Details from these data are provided separately for the fall and spring groups and summarized at the end of this section. For the fall groups, those who completed and those not completing surveys are compared and groups in different locations are compared with each other. All participants in the spring group completed the pre-program survey and all except one completed the post-program survey and the full program.

3.2.1 Description of Participant Mothers and their Families

3.2.1.1 Fall Groups

Overall, 40 mothers started NF in the fall groups and 34 completed the final survey. Of those not completing the survey, four dropped out of the program. The breakdown by city is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of NF Participants by City (Fall 2002 Groups)

	Number Registered	Number completing Survey	Number completing program*
Montreal	15	12	14
Toronto	10	7	7
Vancouver	15	15	15
Total: all locations	40	34	36

*Program completion was defined as attending 6 sessions or more, including one of the last two sessions.

The Vancouver and Montreal groups were larger than the group in Toronto. Montreal and Toronto had 20 to 30% of participants not completing the final survey, while all of Vancouver's participants completed the final survey.

Characteristics of participants who completed the survey are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Selected Characteristics of NF Participants (Fall 2002 Groups)

Characteristics of the 34 participants completing NF	Mean	Median	Range	Comments
Mothers' ages	34 years	34 years	21 - 45 years	Most (74%) participants between 26 and 40 years old
Mothers' length of time in Canada (all born outside of Canada)	3.0 years	3.0 years	0.5 - 6 years	Half of mothers in Canada between 1.5 and 4.5 years; 88% between 1 and 6 years
Fathers' length of time in Canada (all born outside of Canada)	7.9 years	3.0 years	0 - 20 years	Fathers' average time in Canada higher due to four fathers in Canada 11 to 20 years. 60% in Canada between 1 and 5 years
Number of children in each family	2.2 children	2.0 children	1 - 6 children	Most (91%): 1 to 3 children
Gender of fall group children	--	--	--	30 girls; 38 boys (total 68 children)
Youngest child's age	5.0 years	4.8 years	0 - 11 years	Youngest child in 9 families (27%) age 2 or under.
Oldest child's age	8.8 years	7.8 years	3 - 19 years	Oldest child in 9 families (27%) was 4 or under, suggesting these mothers had little or no school experience
Number of adults in household	1.8 adults	2.0 adults	1 - 4 adults	Two adults most common—16 families (57%); 9 families (32%) have one adult; 3 families (11%), three or four adults (6 families, missing data)
Total household size (adults and children)	4.1 people	4.0 people	2 - 8 people	Five adults & children most common—9 families (32%); 7 families (25%)—3 people; 6 families (22%)—4 people. (6 families, missing data)
Ease of speaking English or French (language of	3.7	4.0	1-7	Only 7 mothers (21%) spoke the language of their children's school easily (6-7). (Scale: 1 = very hard; 7 = very easy)

children's school)				
Income of family	\$15,000-22,999	\$15,000-22,999	\$0-\$42,699	85% of families' incomes are below the Low Income Cut-off, ² compared with 20% of Canadians. ³

Mothers and fathers' countries of birth are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Mothers' Countries of Birth (Fall 2002 Groups)

Country	N	%
Argentina	4	12
Canada	0	0
Chile	3	9
Colombia	7	21
Dominican Republic	1	3
Ecuador	1	3
El Salvador	3	9
Guatemala	2	6
Haiti	0	0
Honduras	1	3
Iran	0	0
Mexico	4	12
Nicaragua	2	6
Panama	1	3
Peru	2	6
Venezuela	2	9
Sub-Total	34	100%

² Canadian Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO) for the year 2000 were used to categorize the program participants' family incomes. LICOs consider family size as well as the size of communities in designating "low" income cut-offs. See Canadian Council on Social Development Internet Site for the LICOs: http://www.ccsd.ca/factsheets/fs_lic00.htm

³ See Statistics Canada Internet Site for the distribution of household income across Canada (1996 Census): <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/famil60a.htm>

Missing	0	
TOTAL	34	

The mothers were born in countries from all regions of Latin America.

Table 5. Fathers' Countries of Birth (Fall 2002 Groups)

Country	N	%
Argentina	2	7
Canada	1	4
Chile	3	11
Colombia	5	18
Dominican Republic	1	4
Ecuador	1	4
El Salvador	3	11
Guatemala	2	7
Haiti	1	4
Honduras	0	0
Iran	1	4
Mexico	3	11
Nicaragua	1	4
Panama	1	4
Peru	1	4
Venezuela	2	7
Sub-Total	28	100%
Missing	6	
TOTAL	34	

Two of the fathers were born in countries outside of Latin America. The fathers born in Latin America represent all regions.

In addition, participants had the following characteristics:

- Marital Status: 18 mothers were married/living with partner (58%); nine were separated, divorced or widowed (29%); four were single/never married (13%). (This information was missing for three participants.) In three cases the fathers did not live with the families.
- Help and advice with children:
 - 22 mothers (65%) reported that they had help with their children; 12 (35%) had no one to help.
 - 18 (53%) reported having someone who gives advice regarding their children; 16 (47%) had no one who gives advice.
 - Two who remained in the program reported neither help nor advice with children; in addition one who did not complete the final survey also reported no help or advice.
- Education:
 - Mothers' Education: eleven (33%) completed university or higher education; another eight (24%) completed technical school or some university; seven mothers (21%) had completed high school and seven (21%) had less than high school education.
 - Fathers' Education: ten (42% of the 24 fathers for whom education information was provided) completed university or postgraduate education; five (21%) had some post secondary education; eight (33%) completed high school; and two (8%) had elementary school only.
 - In the Canadian population age 15 and over, only 13% have university degrees⁴, compared with 33% of the mothers and 42% of fathers. Canadians with less than high school education make up 31% of the population, compared with 21% of the mothers and 8% of the fathers.
- Children's boards of education:
 - Montreal: Comision Escolar de Montreal: three families; Comision Escolar Coquille: one; Comision Escolar Marguerite Boureoyoys: two; Comision Escolar de Pointe de l'Ile: one; missing information: four families
 - Toronto: Toronto Catholic District School Board: seven families
 - Vancouver: Vancouver School Board: eight families; Coquitlam School Board: one; preschool: one; missing information: five families.

3.2.1.2 Fall Groups: Differences between Survey Completers and Non-completers

Six participants who registered did not complete the final survey. These participants were different from those who completed the survey, as shown in Table 6.

⁴ See Statistics Canada Internet Site for distribution of highest education obtained by the Canadian population ages 15 and over (1996 Census): <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/educ43a.htm>

Table 6. Characteristics of Participants Completing & Not Completing Surveys (Fall 2002 Groups)

	Completed surveys	Did not complete surveys
Time in Canada ($p=.014$)	Less than 3 years: 44% 3 years or more: 56%	Less than 3 years: 100% 3 years or more: 0%
Education ($p=.042$)	Did not complete university/ technical: 48% Completed university/ technical: 52%	Did not complete university/ technical: 100% Completed university/ technical: 0%
Income ($p=.043$)	Less than \$15,000 = 48% \$15,000 and over = 52%	Less than \$15,000 = 100% \$15,000 and over = 0%

In summary, those who did not complete the final survey had been in Canada a shorter time, had lower education and lower income. This may suggest that those who did not complete the survey may be more isolated due to their recent immigration and less have access to personal resources. The four who dropped out of the program may have done so because they were preoccupied with other concerns rather than lacking interest in the content of NF.

3.2.1.3 Fall Groups: Differences among Cities

Participants were generally similar across all three locations, with two exceptions: the ages of their youngest children and their ease of speaking English or French.

Table 7 indicates the mean age of the youngest child for each program location.

Table 7. Age of Participants' Youngest Child by Location (Fall 2002 Groups)

Locations	Number of participants	Youngest child's mean age
Montreal ($n=11$)	11	5.9
Toronto ($n=7$)	7	2.3
Vancouver ($n=15$)	15	5.2
All locations ($n=33$)	33	4.8

Participants from Toronto had younger children ($p=.045$) than those in Vancouver or Montreal.

Table 8. Participants' Ease of Speaking English/French by Location (Fall 2002 Groups)

Locations	Number of participants	Mean score (1 = very hard; 7 = very easy)
Montreal (<i>n</i> =7)	7	1.6
Toronto (<i>n</i> =7)	7	3.6
Vancouver (<i>n</i> =14)	14	4.6
All locations (<i>n</i> =28)	28	3.6

Participants from Montreal were much less likely to be able to speak the language used in the school system of their children ($p=.0005$) than those in Toronto or Vancouver.

Several other differences were not statistically significant, but were notable:

- Over 70% of Toronto participants had incomes of less than \$15,000, compared with 57% for Montreal and 39% for Vancouver.
- Over 70% of Toronto participants had some post-secondary education, compared with Vancouver's 50% and Montreal's 42%.
- Vancouver's participants had been in Canada 3.2 years, on average, while Toronto's average was 3.0 and Montreal's was 2.9.

3.2.1.4 Spring 2003 Group

Overall, 15 mothers started the program and 14 completed the program and the final survey.

The characteristics of participants who completed the program are summarized in Table 9. All information was retrieved from the program registration forms completed by participants themselves or through interviews with the facilitators.

Table 9. Selected characteristics of NF participants (Spring 2003 Group)

Characteristics of the 14 participants completing NF	Mean	Median	Range	Comments
Mothers' ages	28 years	28 years	18 - 40 years	Most (73%) participants between 20 and 31 years old
Mothers' length of time in Canada (all born outside of Canada)	2.3 years	2.0 years	0 - 7 years	60% of mothers in Canada between 1 and 4 years; 73% between 1 and 6 years
Fathers' length of	3.0 years	2.0 years	0 - 11 years	67% in Canada between 1 and 4

time in Canada				years; 83%, between 1 and 7 years
Gender of all children				11 females; 9 males (total 20 children)
Number of children in each family	2.1 children	2.0 children	1 – 6 children	Most (93%) had 1 to 3 children.
Youngest child's age	2.3 years	1.3 years	0-5 years	Youngest child in 8 families (53%) was less than one year old.
Oldest child's age	6.7 years	4.0 years	3 –12 years	Oldest child in 11 families (79%) was 4 or under, suggesting that these mothers had no school experience.
Number of adults in household	2.3 adults	2.0 adults	1 - 5 adults	Two adults most common—8 families (53%); 4 families (27%)—three to five adults; 3 families (20%)—one adult
Total household size (adults and children)	42 people	4.0 people	2 - 9 people	Four adults & children most common—5 families (36%); 4 families (29%)—3 people; 2 families (14%)—5 people.
Ease of speaking English (language of children's school)	2.3	1.0	1 - 7	Only 2 mothers (13%) spoke the language of their children's school easily (6-7). (Scale: 1 = very hard; 7 = very easy)
Income of family	< \$15,000	< \$15,000	\$0-\$42,699	93% of families' incomes are below the Low Income Cut-off, compared with 20% of Canadians.

The parents' birthplaces are listed in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10. Mothers' Countries of Birth (Spring 2003 Group)

Birth Country	n	%
Costa Rica	7	50%
Argentina	2	14%
Colombia	2	14%
Ecuador	2	14%
Mexico	1	7%
Total	14	99%*

*Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Table 11. Fathers' Countries of Birth (Spring 2003 Group)

Birth Country	N	%
Costa Rica	6	46%
Argentina	2	15%
Colombia	2	15%
Ecuador	2	15%
Mexico	1	8%
Total	13	99%*
Missing	1	
Total including missing	14	

*Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

- Marital Status: married/living with partner = 11 (79%); separated, divorced or widowed = 2 (14%); single/never married = 1 (7%). (This information was missing for one participant.) In three cases the fathers did not live with the families.
- Education:
 - Mothers' Education: three (21%) completed university or higher education; another three (21%) completed technical school or some university; one mother completed high school and seven (50%) had less than high school education.
 - Fathers' Education: one (8% of the 13 fathers for whom education information was provided) completed university or postgraduate education; 5 (38%) had some post secondary education; and seven fathers (54%) had less than high school.
 - In the Canadian population age 15 and over, 13% have university degrees⁵, compared with 20% of the participating mothers and 7% of the fathers. Canadians with less than high school education make up 31% of the population, compared with 53% of the mothers and 50% of the fathers.
- Help and advice:
 - 4 mothers (29%) reported help with their children; 10 (71%) had no one to help.
 - 10 (71%) reported having someone who gives advice regarding their children; 4 (29%) had no one who gives advice
 - Two mothers reported neither help nor advice with children.

⁵ See Statistics Canada Internet Site for distribution of highest education obtained by the Canadian population ages 15 and over (1996 Census): <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/educ43a.htm>

- Five of the families had an adult other than mother, father or grandparent living with them.
- Children’s boards of education: two families indicated they had children involved with the Toronto District School Board; the rest did not have children in school yet.
- Three families identified that they had children with special needs.
- Thirteen of the 14 families identified their children were receiving child care; about half specified the neighbourhood centre’s family resource program or other programs for families with young children, rather than centres where the children are left without their parents present on the premises.

3.2.1.5 Summary and Discussion of Participants’ Characteristics

The characteristics of the participants in the fall and spring groups are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12. Summary: Participants’ Characteristics--Fall 2002 and Spring 2003 Groups

Fall 2002 Groups	Spring 2003 Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mothers & children ages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - late twenties-thirties (mean age 34) - one to three children per family - youngest child in each family: average age of 5.0 ; median of 4.8 - oldest: average age 8.8; median of 7.8 - about three quarters experienced with Canadian schools (had children age four or older) • Background/immigration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - born in countries from all regions of Latin American - mothers in Canada average of 3.0 years - fathers in Canada longer, average of 7.9 years • Language: half did not speak the language of their child’s school easily • Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mothers: over half of the mothers—post-secondary education - fathers: nearly two thirds—post-secondary education - well educated, compared with the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mothers & children ages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mid-late twenties (mean age 28) - one to three children per family - youngest child in each family: average age of 2.3; median of 1.3 - oldest: average age 6.7; median of 4.0 - less than one quarter experienced with Canadian schools (had children age four or older) • Background/immigration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more than half born in Central American countries; the rest from South American countries & Mexico - mothers in Canada average of 2.3 years - fathers in Canada average of 3.0 years. • Language: most did not speak the language of their child’s school easily • Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mothers: less than one quarter have post-secondary; half have no high school - fathers: one had post-secondary; about half do not have high school

<p style="text-align: center;">Canadian population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income: most (85%) have incomes below the Low Income Cut-off (LICO) (compared with 20% of Canadian families) • Family status: more than half married or living with their partners • Households & support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one third of mothers are only adult in the household - one third of mothers have no help with their children - two have neither help nor advice. • School Boards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Montreal families' children attended schools operated by French school boards - Toronto families were involved with English-speaking Catholic schools - Most Vancouver families' children attended English-speaking public schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - less educated than Canadian population • Income: all except one (93%) have incomes below the Low Income Cut-off (20% of Canadian families are below LICO) • Family status: over three quarters married or living with their partners • Households & support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one fifth of mothers are only adult in household - nearly three quarters have no help with their children - three have neither help nor advice. • School Boards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two have children in the Toronto public schools; the rest have preschool and younger children
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Overall, the spring 2003 group participants had younger children. The youngest child in each family was about three years younger than the fall groups' youngest children, consistent with the target group. The mothers themselves were on average six years younger. As well, the spring group ($n=15$) had less facility with their children's school language, with a mean of 2.3 on a scale where 7="very easy", compared with the fall groups ($n=33$) which had a mean of 3.6 ($p=.037$). The Toronto spring group was more comparable to the Montreal fall group which had a mean score of 1.6. Overall the spring group also had lower levels of education and income and were less well supported in terms of the help and advice they receive about their children.

The statistically significant differences among participants across the three fall program locations may have affected their participation and program outcomes. For example, the Toronto group had younger children; many of these mothers had less experience with schools and may have learned more or differently about Canadian education. Those in Montreal who speak the language in which their children are being educated less easily may have been less comfortable before or even after the program in their relationships with schools.

Although the spring group was less well educated, overall NF participants' education was higher than typical in Canada although consistent with many immigrant groups. This higher level of education is likely to contribute to the importance of education to program participants. The group members had lower income levels than the Canadian norms, most likely related to their recent newcomer status. As a result of their lower income levels and limited English or French, NF participants are likely to experience some isolation and lack of resources. Less facility in the language of their children's school may also mean that the participants have more need for the NF program.

3.2.2 Program Participation and Satisfaction

Participants' levels of attendance and participation, and their satisfaction with the program, are important indicators of the success of the program and evidence of participants' need for information and support. All participants except those in the first group (fall 2003 Toronto group) were paid an honorarium for their participation in recognition of their knowledge and expertise about their own needs and their contribution to the evaluation of NF. In addition, they were presented with a distinctive certificate on completion of the program. Overall, the mothers were actively involved in the program activities and the discussions. They indicated high satisfaction through their attendance, survey responses, end of session feedback and individual and group interviews.

Details are presented below for the fall and spring groups.

3.2.2.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.2.2.1.1 Attendance

Table 13 presents the average attendance and range of attendance for each location.

Table 13. Attendance per Session (Fall 2002 Groups)

Average attendance per session:	Montreal (n=15)		Toronto (n=10)		Vancouver (n=15)		All Locations (N=40)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Mothers	13.4	6-15	6.3	2-10	14.4	13-15	11.4	2-15
Children	14.1	2-19	4.1	1-7	19.6	17-27	12.6	1-27
Average attendance compared with # of registered mothers	89%		63%		96%		86%	

Attendance was consistently higher in the larger groups in Vancouver and Montreal than in the smaller Toronto group, perhaps related to the lack of an honorarium payment to Toronto group members. This difference may also be related to personal factors such as other commitments of families or to the younger age of the Toronto participants' children.

Individual participant attendance was generally high, with the exception of the Toronto group, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Attendance for Individual Participants (Fall 2002 Groups)

Average attendance per participant:	Montreal (n=15)		Toronto (n=10)		Vancouver (n=15)		All Locations (N=40)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
# of sessions attended by each participant	8.4	5-10 sessions	6.5	2-9 sessions	9.7	9-10 sessions	8.4	2-10 sessions
% attending nine or ten sessions	53% (n=8)		20% (n=1)		100% (n=15)		63% (n=25)	

Ten of the 15 Vancouver group members (67%) attended all sessions and the rest came to all except one session. Of the 15 Montreal participants, five (33%) came to all sessions; three attended nine; five, seven or eight sessions; one attended six; and one, five sessions. Attendance in the Toronto group was as follows: two attended nine sessions; three, seven to eight sessions; two, six sessions; one, five sessions; and two, three-four sessions.

3.2.2.1.2 Participation in Sessions

Overall, the facilitators reported that the discussions were very active. There were exceptions for some topics in some locations, but there were no patterns related to topics across all locations. All topics were actively discussed in the fall groups in Vancouver; most topics in Montreal, except for child protection and youth centres, community resources and influencing decisions; and most topics in Toronto, except for language proficiency, school participation, positive guidance and influencing decisions especially about the stress of parenting related to adaptation, child development, school readiness and school relations.

The lack of a common pattern across all locations suggests that less discussion was more related to limited time and the amount of material presented rather than lack of interest in a specific topic. (Mothers' views about the individual topics are reported in the Section 3.3 which describes the findings about specific topics in relation to participant outcomes.)

Participants reported that they liked the discussion aspect of the program most, especially during the first two sessions in all cities (end of session feedback).

3.2.2.1.3 Participant Satisfaction

Participants' comments about the program were overwhelmingly positive. On the parent survey, participants strongly indicated that they liked the program "very much" (mean = 6.9 of 7). All would recommend it to others (mean = 6.9).

In the group interview, the mothers thanked and congratulated the facilitators and program designers for responding to their needs, especially their desires to better understand the Canadian education system and how to relate to it, and to prepare their children for school.

I felt privileged to be part of a research that personally benefited me so much because I don't know the education system, I must confess. Ten sessions after, I feel stronger and

this gives me confidence. I would like to thank the other mothers because I have learned from them and also the research team. Just being part of this group is a privilege; we are 15 women and many others would have liked to be here and make a contribution to this program. (Vancouver parent group interview)

I learned not only about my son but also how I reacted to situations with all my children and I am very happy, and hope there will be other programs. (Vancouver parent group interview)

We really discussed many relevant aspects and I believe we have bridged our information gaps in the areas of education and discipline. Congratulations and I hope you may continue the work. (Vancouver parent group interview)

What I've enjoyed the most about the course is that on your own you can come up with one solution to your problems, but other people always provide alternatives. (Montreal parent group interview)

Well, I had a lot of doubts, doubts that started to dissolve each time I came here. Those doubts were about the dynamic between my child and the school and also the school's relationship with parents. I've had very little experience, since I recently came to this country, and this has been incredibly helpful. (Montreal parent group interview)

It has helped me a lot to learn more about school legislation and how to further help my children, although I already know some ways in which to do this. Thank God that a lot of good came from our discussions. It helped that we learned from each other. (Toronto parent group interview)

When asked to identify the three things they liked most about how the program was delivered, participants in fall groups selected: how the staff ran the program (mentioned by 76% of the 34 participants responding); talking with other mothers informally (65%); and the different topics (59%). Some participants also liked the time of day of the program (41%), the discussion (35%), the location (32%) and even the homework (24%).

Some program characteristics were particularly liked by participants with certain characteristics:

- Mothers with higher education liked the time of day as one of the best things about the program ($p=.041$); 60% of university graduates ($n=15$) liked the time of day, compared with 21% of those who had not completed university ($n=14$). (All locations' programs were during the evening, except for Toronto which had an early afternoon time.)
- Younger participants liked having the program once a week ($p=.014$); 100% of those under age 33 ($n=16$) preferred the weekly sessions compared with 67% of older participants ($n=18$). (All groups were held weekly.)
- Mothers who speak English or French easily liked the different topics best ($p=.024$); 81% of English/French speakers ($n=16$) liked the topics compared with 36% of those who have difficulty speaking English or French.

These findings may or may not have practical significance. Particular program logistics such as time of day and frequency might be considered in relation to participants' characteristics such as education and age.

Some mothers commented on their biggest concern about the program—the time allotted for the program sessions was not enough and the number of topics to be covered was very extensive. Comments of this type were made in all groups, but particularly reflect the flavour of one group's discussion:

Now that I think of the topics we discussed, I believe that three hours would have been more appropriate as we could have discussed many other things more thoroughly. (Vancouver parent group interview)

I feel that all of the objectives that you set out during our first session were very interesting, although I do feel that they were too broad, too ambitious, but still very interesting. It's really given us the opportunity to get involved with our children and provide support to them. (Montreal parent group interview)

It was not sufficient because there were topics we didn't cover. (Montreal group interview)

We needed more time to discuss the topics more deeply. (Montreal group interview)

Yes it was insufficient and it seems that we needed more activities, videos, other materials, much more support resources, the materials were good; there was a need for more creativity, ways of presenting the topics. (Montreal group interview)

I believe the program was too ambitious and there were times that [were] disorganized, more in-depth would have been better. (Montreal group interview)

One Toronto mother suggested a way to address topics in more depth. However, even more time would likely be needed:

I would like to stress that the speakers were extremely interesting, but I also think it's important to go deeper into some of the topics. Maybe we could have more speakers to help do this, such as a psychologist, who specializes in the area of language. These visits by other consultants could take place every so often, not every time we come. This way these experts could provide us with more resources and support when we have questions and doubts. (Toronto parent group interview)

Some mothers recommended that fathers be part of the program. They argued that fathers would benefit from the range of information about school readiness and relationships as well as the child development information.

3.2.2.2 Spring 2003 Group

3.2.2.2.1 Attendance

The attendance at the spring group was quite high, as shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Attendance per Session (Spring 2003 Group)

Average attendance per session	Mean (N=15)	Range
Mothers	12.6	10-15
Children	12.8	9-20
Average mothers' attendance compared with # of registered participants	84%	

About half of the mothers attended most sessions, as shown in Table 16.

Table 16. Attendance for Individual Participants (Spring 2003 Group)

Average attendance per participant	Mean (N=15)	Range
Individual participants' attendance	8.4 sessions	3-10
% attending nine or ten sessions	47% (n=7)	

Four mothers attended ten sessions, and three attended nine sessions. Seven attended eight sessions, and one mother dropped out of the group after attending three sessions.

3.2.2.2.2 Participation in Sessions

In the spring 2003 group, participants discussed all topics actively; where discussion was slightly less active, it was related to lack of time, the information to be conveyed or the extent of the mothers' experience with the topic (e.g., report card). Topics for which the time was too limited were the impacts of immigration on parenting (Session 2) and the need for a community liaison group (Session 5). Topics that involved primarily imparting information included: "Overcoming Communication Barriers" (Session 5), School Structure (Session 6) and the Civics information (Session 7). With regard to the topic School Relationships (Session 5), the facilitators thought this had less discussion because of the low number of mothers with children in school. The topic of School Behaviour policies also received less discussion, most likely for the same reason.

3.2.2.2.3 Participant Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the program was also very high in the spring group. On the parent survey, participants reported that they liked the program "very much" (mean = 6.9 of 7). They also would recommend it to others (mean = 6.5).

Responses from the spring group about the logistics of NF were similar to those from the fall groups, especially in their order of frequency. They liked how the staff ran the program (mentioned by 12 of the 14 participants responding, 86%); talking with other mothers informally (46%); the discussion (31%); the different topics (23%); and homework (23%). Some

participants also mentioned the time of day of the program (23%), number of sessions and number of times per week (23% each).

3.2.2.3 Summary

The groups' attendance at sessions averaged about 85%. Overall, participation was very high except in the fall Toronto group. Over half of participants attended nine or ten of the ten sessions. Discussion was very active, especially where mothers had experience with the topic and the information was directly relevant to mothers' current lives. For examples, mothers contributed their feelings and experiences about immigration and its impact on parenting, children's development, school readiness and school relationships.

The mothers' satisfaction with the program was related to learning about topics of importance to them: their children's development and how to improve children's school success. They appreciated the opportunity to speak Spanish in meetings with other women who had similar experiences. They most appreciated the staff and other mothers, as well as the subject matter. The logistics seemed quite acceptable to them—their primary concern was with the limited time, that is, they wanted more—more in-depth coverage of some topics, additional topics and more discussion time.

3.3 Participant Outcomes

Following is a summary of the key findings and analysis of the participants' outcomes by topic, including the participants' reported learning and the facilitators' views. Participants generally liked all topics, so only exceptions are noted.

For each topic, the results are summarized first in order to orient the reader to the findings. Within each topic, the findings for the fall 2002 groups are presented first, followed by the spring 2003 group.

3.3.1 Social Support Networks: Individual Support & Community Resources

This curriculum topic is introduced in the second session and continues as an ongoing theme. Mothers are introduced to the concept of support networks, including the providers of informal support such as family and friends, and formal support from social, health and other community resources, such as recreation and library services. A primary message is that parenting can be stressful and all parents need support networks to help and advise them. Parents struggling with the stresses of immigration and adaptation especially need support in parenting.

3.3.1.1 Fall Groups

3.3.1.1.1 Participants' Views

Need for and Availability of Support

At the end of NF, all mothers reported they have support for parenting. Their sources were a variety of people, as shown in Table 17. The mothers could check as many on this list as applied to them.

Table 17. Participants' Sources of Support (Fall 2002 Groups)

Source of support	Number of responses	% of total responses	% of 34 participants indicating source
Friends and neighbours	14	33%	41%
Husbands	6	14%	18%
Parents	6	14%	18%
Others in IF Group	5	12%	15%
Siblings	4	9%	12%
Aunts/uncles	3	7%	9%
Grandparents and other relatives	3	7%	9%
Others*	2	5%	6%
Total responses	43	100%	**

* All "Other" responses were recoded to categories, except for two.

**Percent does not add to 100% because of multiple responses.

Friends and neighbours were by far the most frequently mentioned sources of support, followed by husbands, parents, NF group members, siblings and other relatives. Most mothers (70%) identified one source of support; the rest reported two or three sources. Note that when the mothers registered for the program, two reported that no one helps or advises them about their children, so this is a definite gain in support for those two mothers.

In the parent survey at the end of the program, over half of the mothers (53% rated 6-7 in which 7="strongly agree") indicated they look for support in parenting, suggesting an awareness of the need for support. Mothers with less fluency in English or French were more likely to report that they looked for support ($p=.025$): 73% of those for whom English or French was difficult ($n=11$) looked for support, compared with 44% of those with higher fluency ($n=16$). Also mothers who had no other help with their children tended to look for support ($p=.032$): 75% of those who had no help ($n=12$) looked for support compared with 43% of those who did ($n=21$). Finally, single and divorced or separated mothers were more likely to look for support ($p=.035$): 77% of unmarried mothers ($n=13$) looked for support compared with 39% of married mothers ($n=18$).

While mothers have at least some support, many did not report having the chance to talk about parenting frequently outside the group: over half (58%) reported these discussions once a month or less and 10% never talk about parenting. Only about one quarter (27%) talked about parenting at least several times a week (more frequent than their program participation). Toronto mothers reported more frequent chances to talk about parenting outside the group ($p=.002$) (Toronto: 1-2 times/week or more = 100%, $n=7$; Vancouver: 33%, $n=15$; Montreal: 18%, $n=11$).

Most participants also reported that they learned about community and school resources: they learned about resources for themselves (75% rated 6 or 7) and their children (70% rated 6 or 7).

Support and Friendship in the NF Group

Participants in all three locations liked meeting other Latin American women and spoke of the group discussions and mutual support very positively.

I think it helps to know that you're not the only one with problems...and to share those problems. It's really frustrating to be alone in a foreign country where you have to deal with problems, and you don't even speak the language. (Montreal parent group interview)

I would like to add that this program has expanded my support network, knowing that there are others like me. I am identified with the other mothers, I feel good as a result and I am more calm more relaxed. (Vancouver parent group interview)

... since all parents live these moments of angst, yet somehow, we sometimes feel alone in certain situations. Being able to share is good. (Vancouver parent group interview)

The three of us (in the group) support each other.... (Toronto parent group interview)

More specifically, participants reported learning from others and sharing experiences and feelings:

I've learned so much from everyone. I've especially learned to talk about my problems, because ... I tend to keep things inside. I had to learn how to share, eh, because that's what everyone else was doing, sharing their problems...so I too shared the problems that I've had. (Montreal parent group interview)

... the possibility of exchanging ideas with other women, which is a good way to break the isolation and frustrations we each have (Parent survey—Montreal mother)

I met this group of women thirsty [for] information with a need to access support networks, and willing to make a contribution. (Vancouver parent group interview)

When we first came I was very lonely, I didn't know anything. I spent all my time with my children. This was the best investment I have ever made as it will affect for ever. (Vancouver parent group interview)

We practically have the same expectations and desires regarding our children's education including that the Spanish language be properly supported. (Vancouver parent group interview)

Although discussion was an important part of the group process, lack of time for discussion was an ongoing theme through all the groups. However, in the end of session feedback, some Montreal mothers expressed a different view: they thought there was too much discussion of individual personal experiences by some group members.

As found in the parent survey, most mothers (82%) agreed they made friends in the program. However, only 15% of the mothers indicated that they get support for parenting from other members of their NF group. Although this seems somewhat contradictory, it may be that the terms “friend” and “support” have specific meanings in this context.

In Toronto mothers commented that they talk with each other in church and at the supermarket but do not visit each other. One mother in the Montreal group noted that she did not form “real” friendships. Participants in Vancouver and Montreal mentioned their desire to continue their contact with each other through ongoing meetings or a support group. In fact, another group was established in Vancouver with a number of the fall group participants as well as new members.

I believe we have developed a nice relationship, we have telephone numbers and we will meet every month and we will touch base from time to time. We should be in touch, so we can exchange information about seminars, workshops and other events. We should be able to strengthen this relationship, it is important. We don't have more time but we will keep in touch, we would use e-mail because it is easier, but the telephone as well.
(Vancouver parent group interview)

The group solidified, they have strong communication ties; they call each other; from this group another group was established and all mothers participate. (Vancouver follow-up session 11 participant)

In addition, some Vancouver mothers continued to meet to advocate for better working relationships with the Vancouver school board:

We are a committee of 5 people. We plan to meet again as a whole group to discuss the final draft and then we will submit it.

Mothers learned about community resources from the program. At the end of the program 70 % knew where to find resources for their children (rated 6-7) and 75% resources for themselves:

... if you have the right information, you can access support and the many options available (Parent survey—Toronto mother).

3.3.1.1.2 Facilitators

Evidence from facilitators about the initiation of networks among participants was present in the debriefing forms, for example, through specific documentation about the exchange of phone numbers. The Vancouver group progression from the beginning and throughout of the group was noted:

Session 2: *...they shared and asked many questions that were answered by themselves....The mothers demonstrated that they learn from each other.*

Session 5: *They are considering to create a support group coming from this group; they talk to each other frequently.*

Session 9: *They already started their support group.*

Facilitators reported the groups engaged in mutual problem solving during sessions. For example, in Montreal the group became “a way to overcome the loneliness” of recently immigrated families. On the other hand, the facilitator noted that it may be unrealistic to expect that friendships would happen as a result of the limited contact in the group sessions. The support network development tracked in the debriefing forms indicated that, although networks seemed to be initiated, ultimately participants did not meet or interact outside the group:

Session 2: *The mothers seem interested in broadening their support network.*

Session 4: *The group has definitely solidified.... Small solidarity networks started to form, some not always have the country of origin... as their basic criteria, however the true determining criteria is mutual affinity.*

Session 5: *The group is interested in continuing meetings after the 10 sessions are completed.... Finally after five sessions the participants feel they are ready to form small work subgroups.*

Session 6: *The participants seem very happy attending the meetings, but they don't seem to have developed friendship with one another.... The group is important for the participants as it breaks their isolation.*

Session 9: *Openly the participants said that although they feel fine with other participants they never had time to form a true group outside the meetings. Although they feel good about the other participants it seems premature to think of establishing friendship; this does not mean that all the participants appreciate each other.*

In all three groups, there was consideration of continuing in some form: in Vancouver the facilitator reported that the support group plans to meet once a month; in Montreal, a proposal has been prepared to continue the group; and in Toronto, the facilitator expressed interest in developing a peer support group to welcome and support new newcomer families to schools.

Facilitators noted that participants exchanged information about community resources, in addition to the information facilitators provided. Participants shared their experiences of using or visiting services. As the Vancouver facilitator wrote in the debriefing form:

They are discovering support resources they didn't know existed.

They visited agencies and places where they will take English courses and will get help to prepare activities for their children.

They take notes about places to get information and distribute information obtained on the internet.

Sharing information about community resources continued throughout the sessions, especially in Toronto, where specific resource information brought in by participants is described in later sessions.

The facilitators also noted aspects of the curriculum and its group-based delivery that promoted the open discussion and development of a supportive environment. All facilitators felt the limited time may have limited discussion and thus group cohesion. For example, in Montreal, open expression “without time limit ... consolidated the group”; working in smaller groups helped to facilitate group process in Vancouver; and in Toronto the facilitator reported that the “circle technique” enabled all participants to talk (Debriefing forms).

3.3.1.2 Spring 2003 Group

3.3.1.2.1 Participants

At the beginning of the spring group, about half (53%) of participants agreed (rated 1 or 2 of 7, where 1 is “strongly agree”) that they look for support for parenting; they did not report much change by the end. However, by the end of NF they increased the frequency with which they talk with others about parenting: initially most (67%) talked about parenting once a month or less; at the end of the program, over half (53%) talked about parenting at least several times a week (more than the weekly NF sessions). This difference was statistically significant ($p=.010$; $n=12$; pre-program mean=2.9; post-program mean=4.5).

At registration three mothers did not have any help or advice with parenting.⁶ At the end of the program, one of these had dropped out and one continued to report no support. The distribution of sources of support at the beginning and end of the group was similar.⁷ Table 18 shows the support sources of participants at the end of the spring group.

Table 18. Participants’ Sources of Support at End of Program (Spring 2003 Group)

Source of support	Number of responses	% of total responses	% of 34 participants indicating source
Husbands	8	42%	67%
Siblings	3	16%	25%
Friends and neighbours	2	11%	17%
Parents	2	11%	17%
Aunts/uncles	1	5%	8%
Grandparents and other relatives	1	5%	8%
Others in IF Group	1	5%	8%
Others*	1	5%	8%
Total responses	19	100%	**

*All “Other” responses were recoded to categories except one.

⁶ On the pre-program survey, two of the three who indicated no help or advice at registration reported had supports with parenting. This anomaly may be due to different interpretations of the terms “help”, “advice” and “support.” The one who reported no supports at registration and pre-program continued to report no supports at post-program.

⁷ The exceptions were that, at the beginning of NF, the number of participants who reported parents as support sources was eight, compared with two at the end; and the number who reported husbands as sources was twelve at the beginning and eight at the end. It is possible that the mothers saw these groups as less supportive but this seems unlikely, given the qualitative feedback.

**Percent does not add to 100% because of multiple responses.

Over two thirds of the mothers listed their husbands as a source of parenting support. This is higher than in the fall groups. This may be because “spouse” was added to the response options for the spring groups or it could be due to an actual difference in their perceptions. As in the fall groups, members of the immediate family and friends were the other primary sources of support.

All except one mother had at least one source of support. Two mothers listed three sources of support; four indicated two sources; and all the rest except two reported one source.

Mothers’ increase in their knowledge of resources for themselves and their children was statistically significant. See Table 19.

Table 19. Participants’ Knowledge of Community Resources (Spring 2003 Group)

Parents have a good understanding of...*	Pre-program mean	Post-program mean
Know where to find resources for my child (<i>n</i> =11, <i>p</i> =.009)	4.1	6.3
Know where to find resources for myself (<i>n</i> =12, <i>p</i> =.002)	3.7	6.3

* Note that mothers indicated they “already knew a lot” about resources were excluded from the statistical analysis.

Mothers commented on the importance of learning that there are others who are facing similar problems and sharing experiences with others in the NF group:

... sharing experiences made us change our past attitudes. Sharing experiences helped us to learn because when I hear from them what we need to with our children, I learn. (Group interview)

I believe it is important to share ideas (Parent survey)

One learns a lot and realizes that there are other moms facing the same situation one does, and also having the same problems but overcoming. (Parent survey)

It has helped me a lot because one can always learn a new thing from everyone. (Group interview)

3.3.1.2.2 Facilitators

In the session in which the need for social support was covered, mothers identified their sources of support. The facilitators recorded that participants referred to “family kin, and externally..., friends, organizations and health professionals.... This spontaneous dynamic in fact anticipated the activity of introducing local sources of support [yet to come in the curriculum].” These participants also recognized that they had left behind sources of support as they discussed their immigration experiences and the stress involved. The facilitators commented that one mother began to acknowledge her need for support: “One mother barely left the house; now she recognizes that she needs to leave the house and gets out more.”

The facilitators noted the development of social networks within the group over the course of the ten sessions:

Session 2: ... the group displays a very high level of comfort in sharing their own experiences...[and] displays a certain level of external connection with mothers doing homework together and meeting.... One reason for this may come from the fact that a high number of them come from the same country.

Session 3: Some of the participants interacted outside of the group to work on the homework activities. They all were glad to share their contact numbers so they can communicate externally with one another....

Session 7: A mother in the group is expecting a baby soon and the group decided to organize a baby shower in the upcoming Saturday and invited the facilitator.

Session 9: Support networks and dynamic interaction were evident in distinct moments of this session. Mothers provide examples [about discipline] from their own childhood, and from their current homes.... Mothers also displayed a moment of sympathy and solidarity in some harsh situations some of the mothers were facing by sharing suggestions for legal and social help. One mother committed to bring some food for the following [last] session.

The facilitators also reported on information sharing about community resources in several sessions:

Session 2: Mothers made direct reference to how they have benefited from the external service....[For example, one] ... child's behaviour in relation to other children has improved dramatically as she started going to the children's program....

Session 3: They all reported visits they had paid to agencies providing names of the organizations, telephone numbers, criteria for enrolment, addresses, etc. Some mothers made the homework together in groups. One collected brochures and searched for services in newspapers. Another group went to a neighbourhood centre and collected information on the kind of services they provide. A mother from this group stood up and presented a flip-chart sheet with the summary of the services they had collected.

Session 7: One mother informed the group that the registration for the Toronto Parks and Recreation swimming program... would start on the following day [and that] the library branch has advertised a summer program for children.

3.3.1.3 Summary and Discussion

Almost all mothers reported that they have support for parenting. They get support from friends and neighbours (most frequently mentioned in the fall group) and immediate family members, especially husbands (most frequent in spring group), parents and siblings. Over one third have more than one source of support for parenting.

At the end of the program, about half of mothers in fall and spring groups reported that they look for support in parenting. Those most likely to look for support included: lone parents, mothers who had no other help with their children and those with less English or French fluency. The spring group reported a statistically significant increase in the frequency with which they had a chance to talk about parenting from the beginning to the end of NF; over half talked about

parenting at least several times a week by the end of the program. The fall groups reported talking about parenting less frequently by the end of NF than did the spring group.

The mothers spoke highly of their mutual learning and support in the group. They reported making friends, but few identified the group as a source for parenting support. This difference may be related to their interpretation of the terms “support” and “friendship.”

Another aspect of support networks was the participants’ knowledge about community resources. In both fall and spring, participants learned about resources for themselves and their children. A statistically significant increase in the spring group mothers’ knowledge at the end of NF was found.

From the facilitators perspective, the mutual support aspect of group members’ interaction was important. All groups showed evidence of becoming more interactive and supportive over time. Of the fall groups, the Vancouver group was the only one that continued in some form, although the Montreal group also made efforts to continue. Facilitators noted in some groups that members met outside the group and in others they did not. The reasons for these differences are not apparent but may be related to practical matters such as their proximity to each other, or to the possibility that the mothers did not have a lot in common with each other except for their interest in the NF program’s content and the group experience.

Overall, mothers acknowledged their need for support by attending the groups (some very regularly) and by their remarks about sharing their experiences and expanding their support networks. In all groups, mothers acknowledged the value of the group as a support through their interaction and their comments.

3.3.2 Immigration, Adaptation and Parenting

3.3.2.1 Fall 2002 Groups

This topic continues the theme that the participants are under a lot of stress because of the impact of recent immigration on their parenting. Their feelings about adaptation to Canadian society while recognizing their own culture are elicited and explored.

3.3.2.1.1 Participants

In the group and individual interviews, the mothers reported coming to learn about the Canadian education system because of cultural differences and the lack of support from family and friends they left behind.

I didn’t know anything about the educational system.... It’s more difficult in a new country. In our countries, we can always ask a neighbour or a sister, but here I have no one. (Toronto parent group interview)

I didn’t know education was compulsory here, even kindergarten.... I didn’t know about education in this country. (Toronto parent group interview)

I wanted to know more about the education system—especially primary education—since I didn't know anything at the time. (Toronto parent group interview)

... in this society men are involved with the education of their children more so than in our countries where there is a different mentality.... (Vancouver parent group interview)

The mothers struggled to understand these cultural differences and to learn what to expect in schools and what is expected of them and their children. Another theme related to adaptation was learning different approaches to promoting child development, disciplining children and parenting techniques. These specific topics are addressed later in the findings.

Mothers also explored how culture affects their parenting practices. As reflected in the parent survey, about half of the mothers believe that culture affects “how I try to raise my children” (38% rated this “very much” [6-7] and another 12% rated this “somewhat” [5]). On the other hand, over one third believe that culture does not affect their child rearing. Mothers with higher incomes were more likely to believe that culture affects how they raise their children ($p=.008$). Of those with incomes \$15,000 and over ($n=13$), 62% believe that culture affects how they raise children “very much” (6-7); of those with incomes less than \$15,000 ($n=13$), 14% believe that culture affects how they raise their children “very much”.

Mothers also commented about the impact of culture on parenting and how they are dealing with this in the group interviews.

As a mother, there are certain beliefs that I'll always protect, but I'll also take the best that this culture has to offer and I'll use it. (Montreal parent group interview)

In my view, I continue to be the same mother I was before. I'm not interested in becoming a Canadian mother at this moment. (Montreal parent group interview)

As a mother I have my own beliefs and values that reflect how I was brought up and I don't think that's going to change. Of course, I'll use some of the ideas, but not everything (Montreal parent group interview)

... we came here with other ideas, after all we were educated differently, in a strict manner.... (Toronto parent group interview)

Some mothers also struggled with role changes in their adaptation to Canada, moving from a life in which they enjoyed a different socio-economic status:

The most difficult thing we face is our change of roles from a very active life in your original country to be more or less a maid preparing the meals for the husband and son.... Today I have with your support the strengths to respond with enjoyment to being a mother and a woman.... This is fulfilling, playing with [my son] is fascinating.... (Montreal parent group interview)

... assuming different roles is a very complex issues and when you have to fulfill all these roles you didn't have before, [it] can be an interesting experience.... (Montreal parent group interview)

Participants discussed how they could preserve cultural and family values and share information about their culture, while recognizing, dealing with and incorporating the positive aspects of Canadian culture.

The program has taught me to talk with them [my children] about my experiences as a child with my own grandparents, my father. They seem to understand the situation of the Latin American family as an entity now. The program has contributed to my youngest son learning about his roots, because before he didn't even know where he was from.... (Vancouver parent group interview)

... I would like to instil my values but at the same time allowing her to know other cultures. I would like very much that she is able to adapt to live in both cultures, my values on one hand and those of the new world she is facing now, and to combine them. I don't want to impose things to my daughter, as I know this wouldn't work, but learning and mixing to get the best of this mix.... (Toronto individual interview)

Most mothers (85%) reported learning Canadian ways to help children become more ready for school (70% rated 6-7; another 15% rated 5). None felt that they already knew a lot about this.

One important theme was how far cultural adaptation must go; they expressed concern about how to deal with this as their children got older and became adolescents.

... at home I try to preserve my culture. But that is very difficult for my son because he lives between two cultures, the one that includes his family at home, and the one that he lives when he leaves my house and goes out with his friends. At this stage in his life, it is a little bit easier, you manage somehow, but when they're teens, it's harder—this development is part of being a human being—and this happens in every culture all around the world. So then, how can I prepare for when this moment arrives, what can I do to learn to control the situation? (Montreal parent group interview)

I believe it is important to provide support to parents with adolescents ... [due to] the difficulties Latin American women have. (Vancouver parent group interview)

Almost all mothers like to share information about their culture (94% rated 6-7—very much). As well, most (82%) reported learning from the program that it is good for teachers to know that their culture is different. One mother reported an example:

...I wrote a list of special things of my country and gave him [my son] to take to his class. He ... presented the information to the class and he came home and was very happy because the teacher showed much interest and asked many questions, now saying that she even wanted to learn words in Spanish. (Vancouver parent group interview)

3.3.2.1.2 Facilitators

Facilitators reported that all groups discussed the impacts of immigration on families and children, for example, the resulting loneliness and stress that compounds parenting. In Montreal in particular, common problems raised by mothers were documented, including: role differences, leaving supports behind, professional disqualification and sense of discrimination that may accompany it. The facilitator believed that these discussions contributed to the group cohesion:

[In our countries] we had the help of maids and the family, but here no, we have all the responsibilities regarding our children. (A Montreal mother, as quoted in the debriefing form)

I like that men have adapted here, they do chores, they look after the children. In our countries this wouldn't be possible. (A Montreal mother, as quoted in the debriefing form)

The topic of immigration and the adaptation process ... allow[ed] identifying common problems, for instance the professional disqualification, the difficulty with leaving the family and the discrimination that seemingly is affecting some of the mothers. (Montreal debriefing form)

Facilitators' debriefing comments documented that discussion of cultural differences continued into later sessions, for example, in relation to parents' involvement in schools and differences in teaching approaches. As well, they noted that some mothers were very concerned about how the cultural differences might affect their ability to influence their children as they grow into adolescence.

The mothers insist the need to include the topic of adolescence and the psychosocial impact of immigration. (Montreal debriefing form)

3.3.2.2 Spring 2003 Group

3.3.2.2.1 Participants

Spring group participants highlighted this topic among the most important things they talked about and learned (end of session feedback):

The experiences of leaving my country and my adaptation to Canada

How difficult it is to live or start all over again in this country

That I am not the only one who misses her country of birth.

At the end of the program, three quarters (71%) of the mothers believed "culture affects how I raise my children" (rated 6-7).⁸ Most mothers (93%) agreed they learned Canadian ways to help their children get ready for school (71% rated 6-7; 21% rated 5). Most (93%) liked sharing information about their culture (rated 6-7), about the same as at the beginning of NF (85%). Likewise, most (85%) thought that it is good for teachers to know about the children's culture (rated 6-7), up from only 57% at the beginning of the program.⁹

3.3.2.2.2

⁸ Note that this question was not asked at the beginning of the program.

⁹ In the spring group there was not enough variation in income to assess whether income made a difference to participants' views about sharing cultural information with their children's teacher.

Facilitators

In the debriefing forms, facilitators reported that the topic was very well covered and that:

Mothers actively shared information about their experience in leaving their country and then adapting here.

Mothers were very engaged in providing examples about the sorts of stress they have faced while trying to adapt in the new country.

This theme continued throughout the program, with mothers identifying differences and similarities in cultural and educational practices between their own countries and Canada. The topic Experience with Bias was not covered due to lack of time.

3.3.2.3 Summary and Discussion

This topic was important early in the curriculum because it set the stage for conveying information about Canadian education and approaches to teaching and child development. It also helped facilitators better understand mothers' views about education and parenting.

NF was promoted as a program to help mothers learn about Canadian education. Mothers in the fall groups were very eager to get into the meat of this discussion in order to understand the differences between their own views and the Canadian experience and to help their children get ready for school.

This topic also promoted interaction among participants and provided a basis for mutual support—a sense that they all had a similar base of experience and common problems.

Over half of all participants felt that their culture affects their childrearing practices; higher income participants are less likely to think this than those with lower incomes. Mothers reflected on whether they have changed their child rearing practices as a result of their involvement in NF: many feel they have and some do not. However, almost all learned strategies used in Canada to better prepare their children for school.

Most mothers like sharing information about their culture. Pre-post program results indicated that participants felt more strongly at the end of the program that it is important to provide their child's teacher with information about their culture.

Although the subject of immigration and adaptation appears in the curriculum as a specific topic requiring only part of a session, there is evidence from both participants and facilitators that it deserves attention as an ongoing underlying theme. It may be that it does not require additional time, rather sensitivity to participants' need for discussion about the impact of immigration on parenting in relation to the other topics in the curriculum.

3.3.3 Understanding and Promoting Child Development

The focus of child development in the curriculum is social, emotional and language development. Mothers are provided with basic information about how children develop, including the role of play, and parents' roles in child development.

3.3.3.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.3.3.1.1 Participants

Child development knowledge and perceptions

Mothers' responses on the parent survey provide strong evidence that they learned about child development, especially related to social and language development and their role in their children's development. Table 20 shows their reported learning for all locations as well as each city.

Table 20. Knowledge and Perceptions about Child Development (Fall 2002 Groups)

Parents learned....	All Locations Mean (scale 1-7)*	Montreal Mean (n=12)	Toronto Mean (n=7)	Vancouver Mean (n=15)
It is important to have fun with your children	6.8	Differences not statistically significant		
Knowledge about child development—how children learn (i.e., getting children ready for reading, through play, talking [in any language], games & stories, parents' roles)	6.4	6.1	6.4	6.8 (p=.03)
Understanding of own child's development ¹⁰ (gets along well with others and parent, has age appropriate language and motor skills, deals with problems, conflicts and changes, shares feelings)	6.1	5.9	5.6	6.4 (p=.03)

*Reversed from original scale for consistency in reporting: 1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree

Participants' learning and perceptions differed among the cities. The Vancouver mothers indicated a greater knowledge of child development than those in the other two cities.

Participants provided examples about how they promoted their children's development. In the Toronto group interview, a mother talked about what she does to promote her child's independence:

I use stories with [my daughter]. For example, I'll ask her what she would do in any given situation, what she thinks about it. She has modified a lot of her negative behaviour due to the resources that you gave us to read.... my daughter stands up for herself and shows that she prefers to be orderly and clean. As we talk about these things, my tension seems to disappear. When we don't have a lot of time, I'll dress her, even if she wants to do it herself. But I encourage her to do it herself, by waking her up early. I manage to do this without getting her cranky by waking her up with tickles and kisses. (Toronto parent group interview)

Another mother relayed how she learned to build routines into the evening with her children:

¹⁰ The indicated items about child development knowledge formed a reliable scale for the fall group (Cronbach's α =.83).

“After dinner, we do the homework together. After that, it’s bedtime, and we’ll play a game or read a book. Or sometimes we’ll sing. They love to sing. And that’s how they fall asleep. Doing these things has helped me a lot, because as I said before, I used to force them to go to sleep by nine o’clock. I didn’t used to read or sing to them. Most of all, having a routine every night has gotten them accustomed to go to sleep by nine. Time flies and they just know its time for bed after the routines we go through.” (Toronto parent group interview)

The curriculum also addressed the development of independence and self-control. Facilitators noted that participants became aware of the differences between the cultures in relation to children’s independence. One Montreal facilitator quoted the mothers:

Latin American mothers are more attached to their children. Here children become more rapidly more independent.

I can’t let my son go to school by himself. I have to drive him. I suffer if I let him go by himself.

Parent-child Relationships

About two thirds of mothers (68%) reported they get along well with their children (rated 1-2: strongly agree); another 9% agreed (rated 3). About 15% thought they did not get along well with their children (rated 6-7). In the parent group interviews they described how NF has helped them to improve their relationships with their children:

In the brief moments we have together, I make a big effort to make them feel good about being with me. We talk, if they want to, about school. We’ll talk for a long time. I give them time to remember everything they did. (Toronto parent group interview)

...today I... respond with enjoyment to being a mother and a woman. I wait for [my son] to come home from school with his concerns and interests, this is fulfilling; playing with [my other son] is fascinating. Then I know they will be impacted by my role as their mother forever. (Vancouver parent group interview)

I have obtained a positive change at home, things are changing in a more positive way with my oldest son.... Things have also changed for the good with my husband, so we are more relaxed now ... that we have other options because in the past we were too drastic with [our son] and he was feeling pressured by us, by the school, by everybody.... (Vancouver parent group interview)

In the parent survey, one participant noted that her learning affected her child who “noticed a change in me.”

Over half of the mothers reported they do not get frustrated by their children’s questions (55%); about one quarter (24%) indicated they do become frustrated. Mothers with no help from others with their children were more likely to acknowledge their frustration with children’s questions ($p=.040$). About three quarters (73%) of mothers with no help agree they get frustrated compared with 3% of those who have help.

Mothers in the Toronto group more often reported getting frustrated (67%) than those in the Vancouver (13%) or Montreal (17%) groups ($p=.010$)¹¹. This may be related to the younger age of the Toronto group children.

Gender Differences

The parent survey posed an open-ended question about parents' hopes, dreams and wishes for their sons and daughters, also an activity in the first session. The results are shown in Table 21 below:

Table 21. Mothers' Hopes and Wishes for their Sons & Daughters (Fall 2002 Groups)

Mothers hope their children will be...	Daughters		Sons	
	Number of responses	% of responses of mothers with daughters (n=23)	Number of responses	% of responses of mothers with sons (n=26)
Able to achieve their goals	10	43%	8	30%
Educated/ professional	6	26%	7	27%
Good	5	22%	9	34%
Happy	5	22%	8	30%
Respect themselves & others	0	0%	4	15%
Somebody/respected	1	4%	4	15%
Good member of society/ responsible	0	0%	2	8%
Good parent/ have children/ happy marriage	2	9%	2	8%
Relate well to/ trust others	2	9%	0	0%
Physically & emotionally well	1	4%	0	0%
Overcome barriers/ grow and learn	1	4%	1	4%
Good son	0	0%	1	4%
Same as son/daughter	2	9%	2	8%

¹¹ Mothers in the Toronto group ($n=6$) had a mean score of 2.5 of 7 (where 1 = strongly agree that "When my child asks a lot of questions, I get frustrated"), compared with those in the Montreal group ($n=12$), 5.0; and those in Vancouver ($n=15$), 5.5.

These data suggest that mothers' hopes for both sons and daughters include wishes for their achievement in their careers, their personal happiness and their general "goodness." It also appears that self respect, respect for others and being "somebody" was reserved for sons.

In response to the question about gender differences in development, mothers had a range of views. About half (47%) believe they develop a lot differently, over one third (37%) a little bit differently and the remainder (17%), the same. Participants explained their positions in their comments on the survey:

Girls are more delicate; boys are more rough.

They are very different in the physical and emotional development.

Their reactions and behaviours are also different as well as the ways they express and conduct themselves.

I believe the environment creates a difference in how they develop but both have the same abilities.

I believe that gender does not influence children's development.

All children are different and they develop differently.

The meaning of the mixed views and comments is not clear and needs further examination. The program appears to have provoked discussion and thoughtful reactions by participants.

3.3.3.1.2 Facilitators

The facilitators reported that this topic engendered strong and enthusiastic participation; many mothers shared experiences and good suggestions. A Montreal facilitator commented: it is important for these participants to "discover the milestones they use to observe their children's development require a different attitude as the social context is different" in Canada. The Vancouver facilitator noted that the participants "all agreed with the information presented." She wrote in the debriefing form that mothers reported they were "getting closer to their children. They read to them, sing with them and feel very motivated." In Toronto, the facilitators noted independence and maturity were important subjects to these mothers with younger children:

Participants recognize that there are some contrastive aspects on children's expected developmental milestones (North America/parents' culture) that are conflictive to their own idea of whether or not their children are mature enough.... In routines in which health conflicts may arise (e.g., let children brush their teeth vs brush the teeth for them to avoid cavities formation), participants suggest to combine both actions as a strategy so that children learn how to follow routine and be more independent.

One mother recognized the need to learn more about her child's individuality and world. She stressed that she is "trying to understand her son's games even when she does not like them."

3.3.3.2 Spring Group

3.3.3.2.1 Participants

Child development knowledge and perceptions

The end of session feedback from participants indicated that they learned about the emotional and social aspects of child development: social interaction, peers and friendship, independence, self-control, children's emotions, discipline and attachment, for example:

how I can help my daughter's discipline and development, social interactions, etc.

what to do to help our children become independent.

Mothers' responses to questions about child development knowledge changed slightly from pre-program to post-program,¹² but the difference was not statistically significant: from 6.06 to 6.30.¹³ Mothers rated their own children's development somewhat lower than the fall groups, an average of 5.1. This may be related to the younger age of the spring group children.

Parent-child Relationships

At the end of the program over half (54%) of the participants agreed they get along well with their children (rated 6-7 of 7). This was a statistically significant decrease from their ratings before their NF participation, when most (87%) reported they got along well with their children ($p=.010$, $n=14$) (pre-program mean = 6.5; post-program = 4.4). It may be that mothers' views of their relationships became more realistic as they learned more and struggled to practice what they learned.

About half (46%) of the mothers reported that they did not get frustrated when their children asked a lot of questions (rated 6-7), about the same as at the beginning of the program. However, after NF, fewer acknowledged that they do get frustrated (14% rated 1-2, "strongly agree" or "agree", compared with 23% at the beginning). The difference was not statistically significant. On the parent survey one mother commented: "I don't get frustrated. In fact I like it." Another reported the opposite experience: "It is a problem for me because sometimes I answer her question but even with the answer she keeps questioning."

In comparison with the fall groups, spring group mothers appeared to be less likely to become frustrated with their children's questions. At the end of NF, only 14% became frustrated, compared with 24% over all the fall groups. Of the Toronto fall group which had younger children similar to the spring group, 67% responded that they became frustrated when their children asked a lot of questions. This difference between the spring and fall groups may be due

¹² For the spring group, the items "Knowledge about Child Development" indicated in Table 20 formed a reliable scale post-program, but not pre-program: Cronbach's α pre-program = .46; post-program = .98. This lack of reliability at post-program may account for the failure to find a change from the beginning to the end of the program.

¹³ Note that in the reported ratings this scale has been reversed for the ease of reading. Throughout this report "7" is generally used as the most desirable rating, unless otherwise noted.

to factors unrelated to the program, for example, personal circumstances or the use of other parent support programs.

Mothers' post-program comments in the survey suggested reduced frustration and positive change in parent-child interaction:

I have changed my way of disciplining her; I am more patient now.

I am more patient and spend more time with them.

I play more with my daughter and I understand her better now.

Gender Differences

Mothers beginning and end-of-program responses about their hopes, dreams and wishes for their daughters and sons are listed in Tables 22 and 23. They are shown in the same order as the fall groups' responses.

Table 22. Mothers' Hopes and Wishes for their Sons & Daughters at the Beginning of NF (Spring 2003 Group)

Mothers hope their children will be...	Daughters		Sons	
	Number of responses	% of responses of mothers with daughters (n=11)	Number of responses	% of responses of mothers with sons (n=8)
Able to achieve their goals	1	9%	0	0%
Educated/ professional	10	91%	4	50%
Good, honest	2	18%	1	13%
Happy	2	18%	1	13%
Respect themselves & others	1	9%	0	0%
Good member of society/ responsible	1	9%	0	0%
Good parent/ have children/ happy marriage	1	9%	0	0%
Relate well to/ trust others	1	9%	1	13%
Physically & emotionally well	2	18%	0	0%
Good son/daughter	1	9%	1	13%
Accomplished as a woman	1	9%	0	0%
Same as son/daughter	0	0%	0	0%

Table 23. Mothers' Hopes and Wishes for their Sons & Daughters at the End of NF (Spring 2003 Group)

Mothers hope their children will be...	Daughters		Sons	
	Number of responses	% of responses of mothers with daughters (n=11)	Number of responses	% of responses of mothers with sons (n=8)
Able to achieve their goals	3	27%	2	25%
Educated/ professional	6	55%	2	25%
Good, honest	1	9%	1	13%
Happy	3	27%	2	25%
Respect themselves & others	2	18%	1	13%
Good member of society/ responsible	0	0%	0	0%
Good parent/ have children/ happy marriage	1	9%	0	0%
Relate well to/ trust others	1	9%	0	0%
Physically & emotionally well	1	9%	0	0%
Good son/daughter	0	0%	0	0%
Accomplished as a woman	0	0%	0	0%
Same as son/daughter	1	9%	1	13%

At the beginning of the program, most mothers indicated they would like their daughters to become professionals, and half wished the same for their sons. Their responses at the end of the program were in a similar order. Given the small numbers, it is not possible to draw any other conclusions although it is interesting to note that fewer mothers mentioned hoping for their children's professional education at the end of the program.

In the spring group, mothers were asked whether boys and girls should be treated the same. More than half thought that boys and girls should be treated the same both at the end of the program (64%) and the beginning (57%). Those who thought there should be different treatment were more likely to volunteer their reasons on the parent survey:

Because girls are physically different with respect to boys.

I think that there are things that are ... [easier to talk about] to the girls that are difficult to talk to the boys. The girls are more delicate.

There is a difference in the way they play..., walk around.

I think it is little bit different because a mother needs to deal with different things until each are done growing.

The mothers who advocate treating girls and boys the same commented:

Explain the dangers and the good to both equally so there is not inequality.

Because they're my kids. I love them equally. I don't make any difference.

3.3.3.2.2 Facilitators

Child development was well covered according to the facilitators' debriefing notes, and participants were very active in their discussion of this topic. The curriculum was used as planned, for example:

They worked in groups and provided a list of things they can do or already do in order to help their children to be socially well engaged with other children.

The mothers engaged actively providing a list of things they do in order to help their children's self-control.

The mothers generally completed the homework related to child development which involved applying strategies for self-control. They also reported back to the group what they did as homework, for example, "stories in their own languages" and "stories of what they did when children misbehaved and that it worked well" (Facilitators' interview).

3.3.3.3 Summary and Discussion

All facilitators agreed that mothers were eager to learn about child development. Both facilitators and mothers provided examples of their learning and how they applied their knowledge.

Participants reported that they learned about child development in both the fall and spring groups. All mothers indicated that their children were doing well in their development at the end of the program. The mothers in the Vancouver group were the most positive about their learning about child development, a statistically significant difference. Those in the spring group tended to rate their children's development lower than the fall group, but the children were younger and this may have been a factor, since the questions are geared more to children over age two.

Half to two thirds of the mothers reported getting along well with their children. In the spring this decreased over the course of the program. About half of all groups reported that they do not get frustrated with their children's questions. These results suggest that mothers may be more thoughtful about their relationships with their children by the end of the program. It may be that mothers' reported knowledge about child development and their beliefs about their children's own development suggest that they have learned how to promote their children's development and are struggling to make their behaviour more consistent with their beliefs.

At the end of the fall group, about half the mothers thought that boys and girls develop differently. In the spring they were asked instead about how boys and girls should be treated—about half the mothers thought they should be treated the same both at the beginning and end of

NF. Those who would treat them differently focused on the actual behaviour of boys and girls and their interactions with them, rather than on expectations about their abilities. In all groups mothers' insightful comments reflected that they were thinking about gender differences in development and childrearing.

Mothers tended to hope that both boys and girls become educated and achieve in their careers, and are good or happy. They were more likely to wish for self respect and respect from others for their sons. Mothers' views at the end of the spring program were generally similar to those at the beginning, with perhaps less emphasis on professional education.

3.3.4 School Readiness and Parent & Teacher Expectations

School readiness is the first topic of the curriculum specifically focusing on the Canadian education system. It covers teacher and parent expectations of children as well as strategies parents can use to help their children be prepared to enter Canadian schools. Specifically, the session includes the role of play and language in children's school readiness.

3.3.4.1 Fall Groups

3.3.4.1.1 Participants

School Readiness

In the individual and group interviews and the parent survey, mothers reported they had learned parenting skills to help their children prepare for school. In the group interview, mothers indicated this was a primary motivator for their attendance at the program, for example:

What motivated me to join was my frustration with teaching my daughter how to read.... I also wanted to know what my children are expected to do at school. As a teacher in Chile, I was very aware of what students were expected to do and learn, but here it is hard to know what to expect. (Montreal parent group interview)

I found that all of the information was very important because prior to this, I didn't know anything... it's good to know what is expected of our children in school and at what stage of their development they should be in. (Montreal parent group interview)

The groups helped mothers understand what to expect at school, for example, the role of play in learning:

We didn't know how to react to the system here, because we found that when our children went to school, all they wanted to do was play. Well, here I've learned that children learn through play. (Vancouver individual interview)

Not only did mothers better understand Canadian teaching approaches, they also took action to prepare their children. By the end of the program, most (93% of the 27 who responded to the question) had changed what they do with their children. They described what they do and the results they see:

It has influenced me in such ways that I believe I am spending more time with my children at home. I read more to them, stories in Spanish, because each opportunity that have to go to Venezuela I bring books and Latin American folktales, but now I read more.... The time I spend with my children is pleasure time, not a burden. I enjoy it and see the benefits of it. (Vancouver parent group interview)

I feel I am more involved in my daughter's education, and not only in her education but also in developing her self-esteem, she becomes happier when I draw pictures with her or ask for the teacher, things like these that I put in place and see results, and it is important for me to see my daughter's reaction. (Toronto individual interview)

... my way of thinking was very similar to that of my parents...., except... I would find an alternative way of doing it so that my children could get ahead.... this programme has helped me to do things differently with my children. (Vancouver individual interview)

I've learned to spend more time with my daughter, to communicate and talk more often. She invites me to do this.... (Toronto parent group interview)

Mothers' survey responses at the end of NF indicate that they are fairly active with their children to help them prepare for school (see Table 24).

Table 24. Parent-Child Activities toward School Readiness (Fall 2002 Groups)¹⁴

Mothers reported that they	Mean (scale of 1-7)*
Talk with child about what they are doing while they play	5.7
Tell child stories in any language	5.3
Look at/ read books in any language	4.9
Talk with child during TV watching.	4.8

*1=never; 4=1-2 times a week; 7=many times a day

Of all these activities, mothers most often talk with their children as they play and tell them stories in Spanish, English, French or another language. The mothers in the Vancouver group were most likely to talk to their children as they play ($p=.02$): 86% of Vancouver mothers ($n=14$) responded "many times a day" (6-7), compared with 43% of those in Toronto ($n=12$) and 42% of the Montreal group ($n=7$).¹⁵

Mothers who had help from other people were more likely to read to their children ($p=.003$): 71% of those with help ($n=21$) read frequently, compared with 17% of those who did not have help from others ($n=12$).

¹⁴Analysis of these items indicated that they did not form a reliable scale; as a result they are reported separately here.

¹⁵ The mean for Vancouver mothers was 6.4 (scale of 1 to 7 in which 1 = never and 7 = "many times a day"), compared with Montreal, 5.4 and Toronto, 5.1.

In addition, about half of mothers (48%) borrow children's books or tapes from the library in Spanish, French or English at least more than once a month; another 21% borrow monthly; 30% borrow only a few times a year or never. Mothers in Montreal were least likely to report that they borrow books or tapes: 50% borrow more than once a month or more frequently, compared with Toronto at 86% and Vancouver at 79%. This difference may reflect library accessibility rather than parents' intentions.

Teacher/School Expectations of Children and Parents

A specific aspect of school readiness is parents' understanding of school and teacher expectations. Mothers' learning about these expectations is shown in Table 25.

Table 25. School Expectations (Fall 2002 Groups)

Mothers learned ...	Mean	% Distribution of Ratings (n=34)		
		% rating 6-7 Strongly Agree	% rating 3-5 Not sure	% rating 1-2 Strongly Disagree
how to help child do what is expected at school	6.4	85%	12%	0%
talking with children in any language is good preparation for learning the school language	6.4	85%	12%	3%
what teachers expect from parents	6.0	71%	24%	0%
what teachers expect from children	5.9	68%	24%	6%
how to help children get ready for reading	5.6	67%	33%	0%

In general, mothers reported a good understanding of expectations at the end of the fall program, one mother described how this understanding helped her relationship with her child's school:

“One of the things that has helped me to apply ideas has been to change my perspective, at least in terms of what I thought were the expectations of children in this country..... I had preconceived notions of educational expectations in Canada and they turned out to be different in reality.... I began to change the beliefs that I had created in my head about what was expected of my child.... I thought that the system was more rigorous than I previously thought. I realize that I have to deal with things differently when my children arrive late to school or when they don't do homework; I have to confront the problem, even if I can't solve it. Now that I know what to expect, I can ask my children to meet these expectations. This has also facilitated the home-school dynamic. (Montreal parent group interview)

Regarding language development and school expectations, the issue of speaking Spanish at home was very much on the minds of the Spanish-speaking mothers. Some had been told not to speak Spanish at home. By the end of the program, most agreed that it is desirable to talk with their children in Spanish. They liked talking about the importance of “our beautiful Spanish

language.” Some initiated more talking, reading and singing in Spanish with their children, for example:

I read to him more in Spanish (Parent survey)

The best part is speaking to them in Spanish (Toronto parent group interview)

[I liked learning that we should]... talk, sing, read in Spanish to prepare my son for school. (Vancouver end of session feedback)

[I liked] ... the advice to speak Spanish and to feel that this is a good guide for the future. (Vancouver end of session feedback)

3.3.4.1.2 Facilitators

Facilitators observed that participants were very motivated to prepare their children for school and they recorded how the mothers shared their own approaches and generally agreed about school readiness. The Vancouver facilitator noted that mothers reported seeing positive results from their reading at home, for example:

... they call me to tell me what they are doing to improve school readiness.

Discussions about the benefits of talking, singing and playing in Spanish, and bilingualism were especially vibrant. Mothers especially liked the homework of telling their stories and playing games from their home countries. Facilitators noted that Toronto participants reported that no one had told them not to speak Spanish, while Vancouver participants understood that they should be speaking English at home, though the source of this message was not clear. They also emphasized that the mothers were concerned that their language was a barrier to school participation.

3.3.4.2 **Spring 2003 Group**

3.3.4.2.1 Participants

School Readiness

In their feedback about the session where school readiness was discussed, participants reported what they liked about learning to promote their children’s readiness for school, for example:

Things I can learn with my daughter, routines, singing, reading and learning together

My own childhood songs

How children use imagination, have fun playing and learn in the process

Although my son had not started school, I have an idea about it—what I can do.

I have a two year old—how to use music and books and how to help them because they are so little. She has learned much and me too....

Knowing that we can use Spanish to talk with our children.

Parent-child activities, five items covering interaction between parents and children that promote school readiness, formed a reliable scale in the spring 2003 administration¹⁶. The results showed a statistically significant change ($p=.02$, $n=14$) from a mean rating at the beginning of the program of 4.5 (of 7 where 7 indicated the most frequency and 1 was the least frequency) to 5.2 at the end.

Many mothers changed their view that speaking Spanish to children at home would hinder their learning of English. This change was statistically significant ($p=.011$, $n=12$) from 4.8 (where 7=strongly agree that talking in own language good prep for school and 1=strongly disagree) at the beginning of the program to 6.4 at the end.

Also mothers increased their use of the library: before the program, half never borrowed books or tapes; at the end, only 2 (11%) had never borrowed. At the end of the spring group, about one third (33%) were borrowing at least once a month. Most mothers reported borrowing books or tapes at least a few times a year.

Overall 92% of the mothers reported changing what they do with their children since their participation in NF.

Teacher/School Expectations of Children and Parents

The survey items in Table 25 (School Expectations) formed a reliable scale¹⁷ in the spring group administration. The difference in mothers' reported understanding of expectations was statistically significant ($p=.0001$, $n=14$). At the beginning of NF the mean was 3.4 (on a scale of 1 to 7 where 7="very much", signifying a strong understanding of school expectations); at the end it had jumped to 6.1. One mother described how she thought the group members had more confidence in their understanding of what they face at their children's schools:

The visit helped the mothers to understand and not to be scared of the first day of school because all teachers in different ways are caring. (Parent group interview)

3.3.4.2.2 Facilitators

School Readiness

Facilitators documented that mothers displayed a particular enthusiasm for the activity in which they were to work together to complete the sentence "talking, singing and reading with young children are good parenting practices because...." The answers were written on flipchart sheets

¹⁶ Parent child activities included items 17-21 (spring pre-program survey): talk with child about what they are doing while they play; tell child stories in Spanish, French or English; look at/ read books in Spanish, French or English; talk with child during TV watching; borrow children's books or tapes from the library in Spanish, French or English. (Response options for the first four items were 7="many times a day" to 1="never"; for the last item the choices ranged from: "every week" to "never".) Cronbach's α was .76 at pre-program and .77 at post-program.

¹⁷ School expectations included items 24a-j (spring pre-program survey): what teachers want from children when they start school; what teachers expect from parents; how to help my child learn to do what is expected at school; about the special help my child can get from the school if he/she needs it; how to get help for my child if he/she has a problem at school; that child care and school are separate so I need to talk with both; where to find resources or programs for my child; where to find resources or programs for me; the role of children's aid societies; and the child protection laws where I live in Canada. Cronbach's α was .79 at pre-program and .71 at post-program.

and then each group presented the work. One of the mothers said, “Not only am I learning more regarding my child’s education, but I am also learning presentation techniques. This is great!” (Debriefing form)

In relation to the importance of routines with children, the facilitators:

Some mothers called attention to the misinterpretation of routines as limitation. They recalled their own experience at home and when they were children themselves. The facilitator mediated the discussion, presenting a list of the positive impacts of routines in parenting, children behaviour, health, schooling and family relations researchers have found. As the discussion evolved, mothers provided examples of the benefit of routines in their own homes.

As in the fall, the facilitators documented that speaking Spanish at home was an important theme for the mothers:

Following the facilitator’s question [about whether] they were ever told to speak in English at home, four mothers answered yes. One mother from the remaining six ... said that in fact her son’s teacher had advised to speak in Spanish.

Another mother was never asked to speak either language at home, but she referred to a friend’s example to defend the idea that children need to enter school with some knowledge of English and that this knowledge needs to be provided by the parents. Following this commentary a mother raised the question “what if the parents don’t speak English, how could they help in this case?”

By the end of the session, the facilitators thought that most mothers felt strongly that families should speak their first language at home since eventually their children will learn English words.

The related homework involved teaching children a song, game or nursery rhyme that they enjoyed as a child and engaging in parallel play with their child for 15 minutes. As recorded in the debriefing form, most of the mothers had done the first assignment:

They recalled songs from their home countries and sang together. Another mother explained about a game that is common in her country (Colombia) and that she often plays with her child.

Parallel play was not as easy for all the mothers, but the process of reporting back had a positive outcome:

A smaller number of mothers had done the second assignment. Those who had done so explained how they had done it. One mother confessed that she did not understand what the parallel game was about. After the explanation, she realised that she usually does it with her child when they’re folding clothes or putting them away together. It was a positive sharing experience for all.

Teacher/School Expectations of Children and Parents

Facilitators reported active participation in the discussion. They found that participants’ views were similar to those of teachers. Facilitators also stated the mothers worked in groups to

develop a list of things that they could do with their children to promote their readiness for school.

3.3.4.3 Summary and Discussion

The mothers in NF indicated their learning about school readiness in a number of ways:

- mothers commented on the importance of information about preparing children for school and how they use it in their everyday lives
- mothers provided evidence of learning what schools expect of children and parents, and how to help their children prepare (There was a statistically significant pre-post change in the spring group.)
- almost all mothers changed what they do since the beginning of NF:
 - they talk, read, tell stories and sing with their children to promote their development several times a week (The spring group made a statistically significant change in the frequency of these activities.)
 - they more frequently borrow books or tapes from libraries; and
 - they feel much more confident about speaking Spanish with their children at home.

At the end of NF most mothers agreed their children would benefit from hearing Spanish spoken at home. For the spring group, this change was statistically significant.

Given the relatively high proportion of mothers who are undertaking activities to help their children prepare for school, it appears that these mothers have changed their parenting behaviour in ways that are likely to result in greater school success for their children. The significant pre-post results suggest this change is due to their participation in the program.

3.3.5 Parent/School Relationships and Rights

This curriculum topic addresses building relationships with teachers and principals, including approaches and skills in communicating with schools to provide and receive information. Mothers are informed about their rights to discuss their children's school placements and progress with teachers, and about how they can become involved in their children's education.

3.3.5.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.3.5.1.1 Participants

Mothers emphasized that learning more about relationships with the school, teachers and principal was a key reason for their participation. They asked for this information early on in Toronto and Montreal. According to the end of session feedback, they specifically liked learning about:

*The relationship between parents and school and how to get more involved in schools
(Montreal)*

The relations of parent, teacher, interpreter, social worker and the roles they play in the adaptation process of newcomers (Vancouver)

How to improve my relationship with my child's school as I believe it is very important to know how our children are doing in school so we can help them. (Toronto)

The importance of doing volunteer work at school so I am more involved in my son's activities (Toronto)

The avenues to participate and get involved. (Montreal)

Mothers' views about the importance of parents' involvement in school were related by the Montreal facilitator who quoted one mother as saying:

Parents' collaboration before and through the schooling process is an important characteristic towards children's success in school.

Learning about communication with teachers was highlighted in mothers' comments about what they learned:

That I can communicate with the teacher without being a burden (Toronto end of session feedback)

... how to approach the school and the teacher.... She sent me notes with information about what my son was been taught. (Vancouver parent group interview)

That I can ask to be heard about the problems my child may have (Toronto end of session feedback)

I realized that although we have or we try to have good communication with the teachers they could be improved. (Vancouver parent survey)

To be able to express my dissatisfaction with my son's teacher (Vancouver parent survey)

How to help and support my daughter via improving the relationship daughter-teacher-parents. (Toronto end of session feedback)

Mothers indicated changes in attitude, knowledge and behaviour. As recorded in the individual and group interviews, they learned how to approach the school and child care staff and get meetings with the teacher and principal, they shared their experiences in doing so, and they reported feeling confident, strong and proud of their interactions with teachers:

I spoke with the teacher and her assistant. The teacher invited me to visit the class, she showed me many things and gave books to take home. Since then my son's class was a totally different thing to me, I was learning and implementing at the same time, she sent me notes with information what my son was been taught. (Vancouver parent group interview)

They [meetings with teachers] weren't too difficult. For me, the hardest was the one where I had to break the ice with the teacher, because of the language barrier that exists between us. Nevertheless, I feel satisfied because the teacher is a very good one and because of that, we are able to understand each other. I feel a sense of success because I

can communicate with him, know what is going on and I can now help.” (Toronto parent group interview)

... what I liked the best was learning about how I could come to the school with issues that concern my children, since I used to think that the school wouldn't take my concerns seriously or do anything about them.... I learned a lot about dealing with those situations, finding out what was happening with my children at school, how to get the teacher to spend more time talking to me, finding out that I had the right to meet with the teacher; I learned a lot about all that. I really liked learning about the education system more than anything else. (Montreal parent group interview)

Well, I finally got up the courage to ask for a meeting with the teacher to talk about my son's absences from school... we had to go to the hospital – I was especially worried about having to explain this to her. Luckily, the teacher was open-minded and told me that she wasn't all that worried because my son was doing well in school. (Montreal parent group interview)

I used to be scared of going to school, of approaching the teacher.... I am no longer scared. Everyday I talk about something with the teacher. I approach her without fear. (Toronto parent group interview)

I [now] regularly send notes to the teacher asking her about [my daughter's] progress, about where she has had successes, how we can work together. Her teacher, whom I chose to be my daughter's teacher, congratulated me on my communication with her. (Toronto parent group interview)

In the parent survey almost all mothers reported learning about their rights to talk with their children's teachers (mean = 6.7 of 7—very much). The other four items related to “Talking with School and Child Care Staff” (Question 30 b, c, d, e: how to talk with teachers, good for teacher to know culture is different, when to use a trained interpreter and how to get one) formed a reliable scale. Overall mothers learned these skills (mean = 6.4 of 7—“very much”). They described their efforts to exercise their rights:

... when my son used to get beat up at school, I approached the teacher but nothing ever came of it. Then I learned that I had the right to go to the principal, or further up, with my concerns if necessary.

I've tried to speak to the principal about my son's problem—I didn't just leave it with the teacher—and the results have been good. Things are definitely getting better. (Montreal parent group interview)

This programme has given me the strength to approach my son's school more confidently even though I'm not fluent in English. This may seem like such a small success, but working in these groups has really given me the confidence and the knowledge that we have the right to visit our children's schools, and not just the schools, other places we're intimidated of because of the language barrier.... (Vancouver individual interview)

One specific aspect of school relationships is accessibility to interpreters. Mothers reported that they learned about when to use a trained interpreter (6.3 of 7) and how to get one (6.5). They also commented:

... if you don't speak a lot of English, you need to get an interpreter in order for good communication to take place. (Toronto parent group interview)

[I learned about] how interpreters can play an important role as liaison between Latin American families and schools....

...the difficulties and advantages of having interpreters in schools (Vancouver end of session feedback)

In the parent group interviews, mothers were asked what they would do if they wanted to learn more about their child's progress:

In my case, I always go with my husband to see the teacher. We introduce ourselves and tell them who our child is and that we're happy to meet them. We explain that we want to know how about our children's education, their progress and how when we can help them. We ask them what kind of support they need from us so that we can help our children. We ask them about their opinions, thoughts and doubts, and we let them know that they should never hesitate to ask us about our children, and that we would do the same. (Toronto parent group interview)

...my husband ... writes a note to the teacher and we send it. It says, 'I need to speak to you with regard to my daughter's education and her progress'. She sends us a note back with a date and time for our meeting. (Toronto parent group interview)

Mothers were also asked in the group interview about how they would handle requesting help for their child. Those in Toronto especially shared their ideas:

... schools are able to offer many alternatives, and in many cases, solutions to children's problems. The school facilitates things and so you feel that you can turn to them for help.

I know the services exist, but if you don't specifically ask for them or if the parents don't initiate it, the school staff may not offer the help even though they feel your child needs it. I would approach the principal, not that I want to go above the teacher, but I'd have specific questions to ask about how the school can help.

Mothers also had useful suggestions about how they would deal with a suspension if the need arose:

I will read the information they sent home first explaining why my son was suspended and then I will speak to the teacher to try to solve the problem. (Montreal parent group interview)

I will go to speak with the teacher, who is the regular channel to follow, for starters... and ask for the reasons. (Montreal parent group interview)

I would ask for a meeting with the teacher immediately and if the teacher's response is not satisfactory, then I would speak directly with the principal. (Toronto parent group interview)

I would get to the bottom of the problem by giving equal listening time to my child and to the teacher, in order to find out if my child is lying or if they are telling the truth. I would find out what happened before doing anything else. (Toronto parent group interview)

I would find out exactly what happened to ensure that our children aren't being victims of abuse by other children, because they are immigrants, they're different, they don't speak English well or for whatever the reason may be.... We have to make sure there aren't problems, by talking first to the teacher, so that we can determine if the child behaved appropriately or not and why they behaved this way. We have to analyze the whole situation and not just accept notice of our child's suspension without question. (Toronto parent group interview)

3.3.5.1.2 Facilitators

Facilitators' notes and comments reflected how important this topic was in all locations. It resulted in active discussion in all fall groups. In Toronto the "Feeling Welcome" (in the school) activity received a lot of attention in the group. The Vancouver facilitator noted that some mothers were "frustrated with a system that does not understand them" and pleased to have the program's support so they can more actively participate at school. The Montreal facilitators recorded that the mothers discussed their feelings and reactions about meeting teachers, visiting and observing classes, making suggestions and their school/parent relations in general. They noted: "Participation was excellent, however the issue of time available remains a source of frustration." That is, the mothers felt they did not have enough time to explore issues related to these various aspects of school-parent relations.

In some cases, mothers in Toronto were already somewhat involved in school but did not know it was an expectation of the education system that parents become involved. During the session topic, Experiences with School, one mother shared a specific problem with the school and got support and guidance from the other mothers.

3.3.5.2 **Spring 2003 Group**

3.3.5.2.1 Participants

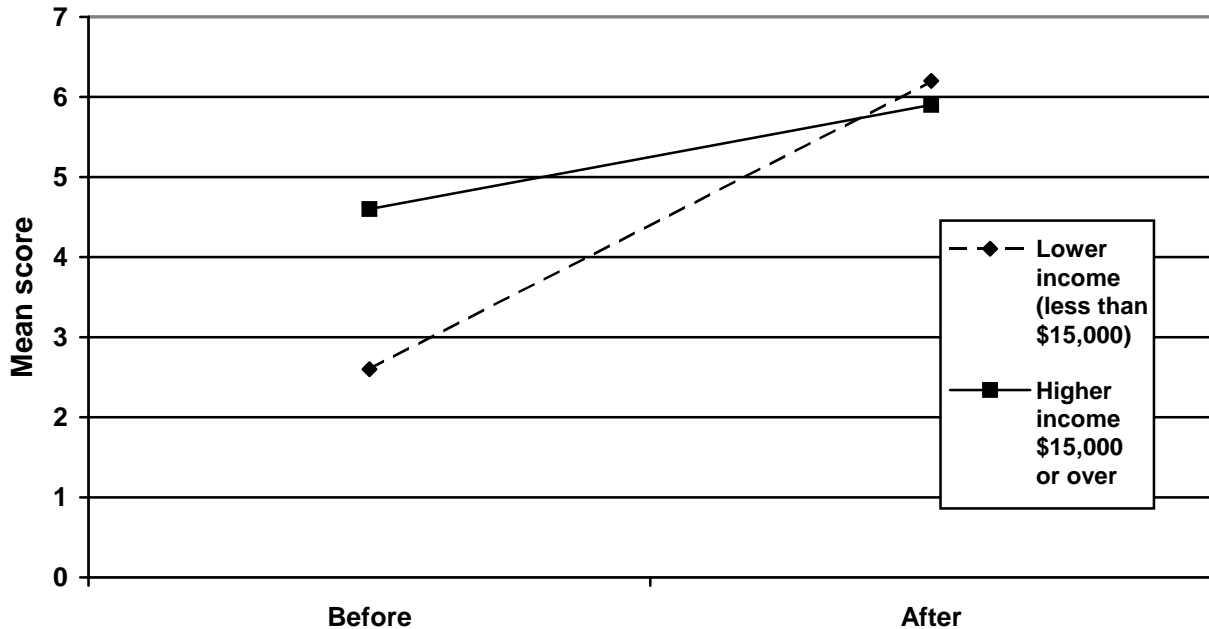
Participants' feedback on this topic was very specific: participants liked learning about "how the education system works"; "approaches to relate to teachers"; "how to get involved in children's education"; and "how to help as a volunteer."

The parent survey items related to "Talking with School and Child Care Staff" formed a reliable scale from the spring group administration (right to talk with child's teachers; how to talk with teachers, good for teacher to know culture is different, when to use a trained interpreter and how to get one)¹⁸. At the end of NF, mothers indicated they knew how to talk with school and child care staff, an important significant change ($p=.0001$, $n=13$) from the beginning of the program (mean of 3.1) to the end (mean of 6.2). Furthermore, the increase in mothers' learning was

¹⁸ "Talking with School and Child Care Staff" was Question 25a-e on the pre-program survey and Question 30 a-e post-program. The reliability as measured by Cronbach's α was .76 for both pre-program and post-program.

greater for those who had incomes lower than \$15,000 than those with higher incomes, as shown in Figure 2¹⁹. This is an interaction effect, that is, mothers with lower incomes started with less knowledge about talking with staff ($p=.034$, $n=9$) compared with those who had higher incomes ($n=3$). Those with lower incomes gained more ($p=.000$, $n=9$) than those with higher incomes and, at the end of NF, mothers with lower incomes reported their knowledge about talking with school staff at the same level as those with higher incomes.

Figure 2. Talking with School and Child Care Staff by Income



With respect to rights, mothers reported learning about their rights to talk with teachers: at the end of the program 100% of mothers felt they had a good understanding of this right, compared with only 33% at the beginning.

It is especially important that parents know about interpreters available through their children’s school. Two of the “Talking with School and Child Care Staff” items indicated that the mothers’ reported knowledge increased regarding when to use an interpreter ($n=14$) from a mean of 3.4 to 6.2 (on a scale in which 7 = “very much”) and how to get one ($n=14$) from 4.6 to 5.9).

One mother offered the feedback that she learned “we can ask for help if we have a problem.” In the spring parent group interview, mothers described succinctly how they would deal with problems that arose:

First I would request an appointment with the teacher and the principal to jointly find options available.

¹⁹ For mothers with lower incomes ($n=9$), pre-program mean=2.6 and post-program mean= 6.2. For mothers with higher incomes ($n=3$), pre-program mean was 4.6 and post-program=5.9 (difference not statistically significant).

... I would go to the school ask for an appointment, get an interpreter and speak directly with the teacher because he is in direct contact with my child and knows what is going on. The solution must be found by both the parent and the teacher.

First I will ask to have an interpreter. I need to be sure that I am going to be able to understand and make myself understood, because if I go ... and I bring a friend and she doesn't want to make me uncomfortable, she may not want to tell me the truth. I want to be sure that I know everything about how my daughter is doing and to make myself understood.

Because we do not know what exactly happened, it is better to speak with the teacher... and very calmly discuss what happened and ask if the expulsion was necessary.

The school visit provided an opportunity to see a classroom in action. Mothers observed:

I ... learned everything related to starting school in Canada.... He [my son] met other children and saw the kindergarten. (Parent survey)

What fascinated me was the number of resources they use to get across. They have good material to carry on their activities. (Parent group interview)

What impressed me the most was the energy used in teaching the children. (Parent group interview).

3.3.5.2.2 Facilitators

Facilitators reported this topic was well covered and generated very active discussion. Regarding parental involvement, mothers reported no experience in volunteering, but two had been to a school event. Facilitators noted that mothers “feel uncomfortable to go to school because of their low knowledge of the language.” They saw it as a barrier to volunteering and communicating with the school. On the other hand, mothers “repeatedly said they believe their participation in their child’s school is very positive and important.”

Mothers reported that they had had some negative experiences with teachers; examples noted by facilitators included:

The teacher had asked her to visit the school to talk about her child’s behaviour. In the discussion, the mother felt that the teacher linked her child’s behaviour with the way the child dressed at school.

Another mother had a negative experience while undergoing a divorce. The teacher did not acknowledge the family’s unfortunate experience and was not able to understand her child’s withdrawn behaviour at school. The mother explained to the teacher that her child is witnessing separation. The mother felt that the teacher was not sensitive to the situation and it seemed that the child had no reason to display negative behaviours at school. The mother has been able to overcome the problem because she has had professional help from a psychologist.

Following this testimony one mother asked if parents have to report to teachers when they are facing divorce issues. Some mothers answered this question saying “yes”, due to

the fact that this circumstance had such a negative impact on the children and this affects their school performance or behaviour.

The facilitator documented the visit to a local school kindergarten as very successful, reporting that mothers interacted with the teacher and children and participated in activities with the class when invited. It was structured as planned in the curriculum, with questions prepared for the group to ask during the visit. Following the visit, the group met to debrief using the prepared curriculum questions. The facilitators commented:

... that visiting the school made them emotional and wishing that their children were ready to take part in that kind of classroom. They all agreed that the teacher was very nice with the children and they hope their children will have a teacher like her once they are in school.

The facilitators quoted one mother as saying: “I feel more comfortable in visiting a school in the future,” and another “I liked the way the teacher was teaching the children their math skills.”

On the topic of ways of improving the responsiveness of schools, mothers developed a list of things schools could do to make productive partnerships with parents easier. The list included the following: consider parents’ languages and provide interpreters and bilingual staff; force or encourage parents to attend meetings; arrange joint trips for children and their parents; provide parents with more information about schools’ activities; and offer volunteer opportunities. They also thought that parents should take the initiative to become more involved. A related curriculum topic, exploring the need for a Community Liaison Group, was not covered due to lack of time.

3.3.5.3 Summary and Discussion

The evaluation results regarding mothers’ knowledge about school relationships and their rights are substantial. Through their feedback and interview comments, mothers indicated that they knew who to approach at school, how to approach them and how to get the support of interpreters. They exuded confidence that they had rights to this communication and the knowledge to use those rights; they shared a sense of accomplishment in describing their experiences from week to week. The parent survey results substantiated the success of the program in conveying information and building skills in school-parent relationships, in particular the statistically significant change for the spring group. Mothers indicated increased knowledge about how to communicate with school and child care staff and the need for and accessing interpreters.

One factor that may have contributed to this learning is the stage of many of these mothers’ children in school—they are just beginning or about to begin school. This means that the mothers are thinking about this issue and needing information and skills. This is an example of the principle of “just in time” learning.

Almost all of mothers’ comments and examples related to their children’ schools. It appears that child care service relationships did not figure as prominently in mothers’ experience. Although spring group parents indicated that they used child care, it may not have been as potentially problematic.

In Montreal, the mothers' immigration experiences with professional disqualification may have affected their attitudes toward teachers and their involvement at school. This might be an area to explore, that is, whether the curriculum might include an optional discussion guide for facilitators should this topic arise again.

3.3.6 School Structure

This topic includes an overview of how Canadian education systems are structured and teaching approaches used in Canada. Child care structures are also covered. This information provides the basis for the topics of school professionals, special education and other special help for children through schools.

3.3.6.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.3.6.1.1 Participants

Twelve mothers, about one third, identified school structure in the parent survey as a topic they knew very little about. In the group interviews, mothers cited specific aspects of this topic as of particular interest: for Montreal, the education reform in Quebec; in Vancouver, the school board election and the need to represent the interests of the Spanish community; and in Toronto, the differences between the Toronto and Separate boards of education, for example:

school reform and how it works in the broad sense (Montreal end of session feedback)

how the school board is organized (Montreal end of session feedback)

how the education system works in pre-school (Vancouver end of session feedback)

...education legislation..., education laws in Canada that I did not know (Toronto end of session feedback)

The mothers reported learning about the structure of school and child care, and how these are generally separate organizations (mean = 6.4 of 7 "very much"). In Montreal, they wanted to learn more about the dynamics of the education system: school promotion, the school divisions and expected outcomes in each division.

3.3.6.1.2 Facilitators

The facilitators noted that information about the structure of the education system was new to some mothers, in particular, in Vancouver. In Toronto, a guest speaker presented this information. She was particularly well received: "participants were extremely interested in getting information about the school system" (debriefing form). As noted, education reform in Quebec was discussed and the facilitator believed this was an important and interesting topic for participants. The topic took a lot of time, especially in Toronto, where one full session was devoted to it.

3.3.6.2 Spring 2003 Group

3.3.6.2.1 Participants

Mothers in the spring group learned about school structures, as found in the parent survey results reported in the section on school readiness (3.3.4.2.1). Specifically the mothers learned that child care and school are generally separate organizations so they need to talk with the staff of both organizations (pre-program mean=3.4; post-program mean=6.1).

At the end of the session, mothers listed the following as important learning: Canadian education system; means of communicating with school; school programs; teaching approaches; the OSR (Ontario School Record); rights and responsibilities; and school marks. One mother found it particularly helpful to have information about the public and separate board systems:

I learned the difference between Catholic and public schools. I had put my child in a school because it was close to home. I come from a Catholic home, but I didn't really know about Catholic schools. (Toronto parent group interview)

3.3.6.2.2 Facilitators

The facilitator commented that much of the information about school structure was new to participants. School structure, the Ontario curriculum, teaching methods and communications, including rights, report cards and suspensions, were generally well covered (to the degree time allowed) by a guest speaker who is a consultant with experience in education policies and the education system in Toronto. The mothers were involved in the session through answering and asking questions of the presenter, rather than discussion. In addition to addressing these topics, the speaker informed the mothers about how they could become politically involved. The speaker also handed out information about special education and provided written answers to additional questions.

3.3.6.3 Summary & Discussion

Mothers in all the groups reported learning a lot about school structures, services and teaching approaches. The focus of different groups depended upon the interests of the mothers, including current changes such as reform in the education system or school board elections; legislation addressing education and school attendance; teaching approaches common in Ontario and Canada; differences between public and Catholic school boards and their services; and specific services for newcomers and different language and cultural communities. The spring group spent less time on this and related topics (e.g., report cards and homework) because most mothers did not yet have children in school.

3.3.7 Report Cards and Children's Homework

The school systems across Canada have different approaches to report cards and homework. The curriculum was location-specific to help parents understand local policies and practices and learn how to interpret report cards and help their children develop good homework habits.

3.3.7.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.3.7.1.1 Participants

Report Cards

The response to this topic was mixed. Mothers in Vancouver found the particularly topic relevant. They highlighted it as the most liked topic in the session that included report cards, homework and special education; for example they liked:

to learn how to understand and interpret report cards

[clarifying] my doubts about report cards

the discussion about report cards at the time the schools were handing them out.

The Toronto group had only one mother who had experience with report cards. Specific questions about report cards were not asked on the parent survey.

Children's Homework

Three mothers in Vancouver highlighted learning about homework—it was important new information for them (parent survey). In all three parent group interviews, mothers reported that “how to help children with homework” was very useful. They learned:

Strategies parents should use in helping children doing homework without interruptions (Vancouver end of session feedback)

Strategies to improve the children's concentration in doing homework (Vancouver end of session feedback)

How to motivate our children regarding homework and how this could be part of their daily routine (Toronto end of session feedback)

... the most appropriate ways to help our children to do their homework (Montreal end of session feedback)

Knowing that schools provide support for homework (Montreal end of session feedback)

Sharing our experiences about difficulties related to homework and French spelling (Montreal end of session feedback).

One mother specifically spoke about a taking a different approach with her son:

I have changed my way of thinking and my son has changed his study habits. I learned here that it is better to help to create habits rather than imposing them.... (Vancouver parent group interview)

3.3.7.1.2 Facilitators

Report Cards

Facilitators reported active discussion, although some mothers did not have experience with report cards. When it was presented and discussed in Toronto, attendance was low and only one mother had experience. In both Vancouver and Montreal, mothers had difficulty understanding report cards. In Montreal especially, “the topic of report cards was very useful as it allowed us to discuss some of the difficulties parents have reading the document” (debriefing form). The facilitators also reported discussion about the “diversity of evaluation methods used in assessing students.”

Children’s Homework

Discussion varied from “sufficient” in Vancouver, through “good” in Toronto, to “excellent” in Montreal. Half of one session in Montreal was devoted to this topic, including: the rationale for homework and how to help children with it; discussion of the differences in teachers’ approaches to homework, that is, whether they gave weekly or daily homework; the pedagogical approach of teachers (especially in their teaching of reading and math); and the childcare centre-based services available to help children with their homework. A number of mothers in Montreal talked about their lack of French language ability as a barrier to helping their children with homework.

In Toronto only one mother had experience with homework in Canada. The facilitators describe her experience:

... helping her child with the homework was a “nightmare” given the fact that both child and mother’s knowledge of English was low. Such a frustrating experience was overcome primarily because the teacher spoke Spanish and could give strong support. (Debriefing form)

3.3.7.2 Spring 2003 Group

3.3.7.2.1 Participants

Due to the younger age of participants’ children, this topic of report cards was covered only briefly as part of the school structure topic. One parent would like to have had more discussion about report cards.

During the parent group interview, a visitor from the Newcomer Families Advisory Committee asked the mothers about the term “promotion” and its importance in denoting that children are actually passed to the next grade rather than moved with their peers. Although this had been addressed in a previous session, mothers were still somewhat mystified by this concept and by the possibility that their children’s actual status might not be made clear to them as parents:

What seems incredible is that the child is repeating but still passes the course and one wonders what happened. It is strange because one does not know how the child who was not promoted moves to the next grade because in our countries the child will remain in the same grade.

Most of us trust our children but they are not going to say: “Mom, I failed”.

3.3.7.2.2 Facilitators

Due to the younger age of the participants' children, the curriculum included report cards only as part of the topic on school structure. Children's homework was not covered due to lack of time.

3.3.7.3 Summary and Discussion

Report cards and children's homework were important topics for parents with children in school. These mothers found the guidance about how to deal with homework especially helpful and applicable. Mothers also indicated that report cards were confusing. The discussion about the reporting of children's progress and promotion focused on improving their understanding, although this may require additional attention since the confusion still remained in the last session of the spring group.

3.3.8 School Professionals, Special Education and Exceptional Children

Special education and help for children is included in the curriculum to convey how parents can get the help their children need and the meaning of the identification of a child as exceptional. This topic provides them with specific information about how to seek help and what to expect from professionals. It also offers mothers opportunities to share experiences and attitudes about special education and school professionals.

3.3.8.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.3.8.1.1 Participants

In the parent survey, mothers reported learning about help from schools, as shown in Table 26.

Table 26. Mothers' Learning about Help Available from Schools (Fall 2002 Groups)

Mothers learned about...	Mean (<i>n</i> =34) (Scale 1-7)*
special help my child can get from school	6.1
how to get help if my child has a problem at school	6.7

*1=not at all; 4=somewhat; 7=very much

In all three group interviews, some mothers cited learning about what is available and how to get these services for children who need help. The Toronto mothers explained in the parent group interview how they would get help for their children, as reported in the earlier section on Parent/School Relationships and Rights. In Montreal, mothers liked talking about professional resources and "finding support in schools to identify problems with our children." In Vancouver the topic gave rise to a discussion of the role of the school Community Advisors as well as "how to manage children with special learning needs."

In the group interviews, mothers described what they learned about school's special help for their children.

The school usually provides a lot of help if the child is having difficulty in any area in school. What I mean, is that here, schools are able to offer many alternatives, and in many cases, solutions to children's problems. The school facilitates things and so you feel that you can turn to them for help. (Toronto parent group interview)

I know the services exist, but if you don't specifically ask for them or if the parents don't initiate it, the school staff may not offer the help even though they feel your child needs it. I would approach the principal, not that I want to go above the teacher, but I'd have specific questions to ask about how the school can help. (Toronto parent group interview)

[I learned about] the process I must go through ... in finding resources to help children at school.... (Montreal parent group interview)

On the parent survey, mothers were asked if they worried that their child would be “singled out” if they asked for special help. About one third (32%) of the mothers were “very much” worried (6-7); another 25% were more than “somewhat” worried (rated 5); and about one third were not worried (rated 1-2).

3.3.8.1.2 Facilitators

This topic covered resources available and participants' rights to services if their children need help.

In Toronto, facilitators indicated that mothers lacked experience with this topic but felt it might be needed in future. In Vancouver it was a welcome and relevant topic; participants had more experience and discussed concerns about funding and waiting lists for special education.

In Montreal, professionals in schools were acknowledged as important and a great help to participants. Several had children in a special education program or with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). The facilitator presented information about identification and treatment resources for ADD in addition to that in the curriculum. This issue arose in part from discussions of school discipline. The Montreal facilitators reported that time was a barrier to a complete discussion of special education and related matters; they suggested suggest several sessions for the topic.

3.3.8.2 **Spring 2003 Group**

3.3.8.2.1 Participants

Although special education was not a separate topic, participants reported a better understanding of the help their children could get from schools as shown in Table 27.

Table 27. Mothers' Learning about Help Available from Schools (Spring 2003 Group)

Mothers have a good understanding of ...	Pre-program Mean (<i>n</i> =14) (Scale 1-7)*	Post-program Mean (<i>n</i> =14) (Scale 1-7)*

special help my child can get from school	4.00	6.15
how to get help if my child has a problem at school	3.79	6.00

*1=not at all; 4=somewhat; 7=very much

One mother described useful advice she got from a teacher to get special help and how it worked out for her daughter:

In my case, the summer school was very helpful; it got her ahead. The school advised us to enrol her in summer school and we did. This gave her the extra edge. (Parent group interview)

On the other hand, at the end of NF when mothers were asked if they worried that their child would be “singled out” if they asked for special help, many (42%) were “very much” worried (6-7); 25% were “somewhat” worried (rated 3 to 5); and a similar proportion were not worried (rated 1-2). These proportions are similar to the fall groups.

3.3.8.2.2 Facilitators

In the session on school structure, information about special education was handed out to the mothers. There was no time for discussion.

3.3.8.3 Summary and Discussion

Parents in all groups learned about help available from schools for their children. In particular, at the end of NF parents knew how to get this help if their child needed it. The groups explored different aspects of help available from schools according to their interests, for example, the Community Advisors in Vancouver and special help for children with ADD in Montreal.

One fall group needed more time for this topic. Conversely, groups whose children were younger had little discussion about special education. However, the spring group still showed a statistically significant increase in the mothers’ knowledge about how to get special help for their children if needed.

3.3.9 Parenting Skills and Discipline

The topic of parenting skills focused primarily on discipline. Other aspects of parenting skills such as promoting child development and school readiness were reported above.

3.3.9.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.3.9.1.1 Participants

In responding to the parent survey, well over half of mothers (59%) reported learning new ways to teach their children acceptable behaviour (rated 6 or 7: “very much”); another 10% rated 5; 14% indicated they had not learned new ways of discipline. This may have been because they were already familiar with the methods included in the curriculum.

Mothers who found speaking English or French more difficult were less likely to report that they had learned new ways of discipline ($p=.013$): 40% of those with difficulties in speaking English or French ($n=10$) reported the program taught “very much,” compared with 77% of those for whom English or French was easy ($n=13$).

Mothers indicated they use the following methods to help their children learn acceptable behaviour at least several times a week:

- Encouragement: 91%
- When... then: 58%
- Problem solving: 53%
- Limited choices: 53%
- Planning ahead: 41%
- Rewards: 36%
- Loss of Privilege: 25%
- Time out, time in: 15%
- Ignoring: 9%

The methods specifically taught in the curriculum were: when... then, rewards, loss of privileges, time out and “I messages.” However it is not possible to relate the methods participants reported using to what was taught because they were not asked about methods they used before their participation in the program.

The method “planning ahead” was used more frequently ($p=.03$) by participants who had been in Canada longer: 44% of those in Canada 2.5 years or more ($n=16$) used this method at least several times per week. For those in Canada less than 2.5 years ($n=14$), 29% used it that frequently.²⁰

Mothers described specific changes in their parenting approaches:

... the stuff about discipline most affected me.... Unfortunately, I think that my expectations negatively affected my daughter. I've tried to take the time to create rules, use positive incentives, and in reality, that really works. (Montreal parent group interview)

Even though I used to think, “I can't do this,” the pamphlet said that it would work. I've read it, and it's worked a little - not completely - but that's because it's a process. I've often re-read “Between Siblings,” so that conflicts will not occur. (Montreal parent group interview)

It's true that I used to spank my kids, but now I won't do it anymore because I know it's not the best thing to do. (Toronto parent group interview)

²⁰ The mean for those in Canada longer (2.5 years or more) was 4.8 (1=“never”; 7 =“many times a day”). The mean for those in Canada less than 2.5 years was 3.2.

They were most articulate about management of their anger and alternatives to violence: They talked about attitude changes and the skills they learned and started to apply to avoid physical punishment:

“What affected me more than anything was all the stuff about discipline.... I didn’t really believe in that [discipline without hurting] because I’ve always believed in self-control and all of that. I think it’s good for us to have some theoretical background, but you also have to look at yourself, since we can also go through some stages—some difficult ones too—where sometimes you forget your children’s needs. I now believe that if clear rules are set out, then the result is the development of a conscience. The other day, I looked at myself in the mirror and I realized that I shouldn’t yell at the kids. (Montreal parent group interview)

... we were educated differently, in a strict manner; we were even hit sometimes. That creates a chain: Our parents were educated like that, our parents educated us like that and we end up doing the same with our children. We create a little chain of aggression or what you might call violence. The most positive thing to do is to change that aggression and that violence to something more positive. (Toronto parent group interview)

3.3.9.1.2 Facilitators

This topic generated much emotional discussion, as noted by the Vancouver facilitator. She explained that some mothers use inappropriate methods, express guilt about this and are trying to change, while other mothers are proud of their more appropriate methods.

In Toronto, discipline was covered in relation to school behaviour policies, without using participatory activities due to limited time. The issue of spanking was raised in relation to discipline and child protection laws.

In Montreal, “Discipline without Hurting” was used as a basis for discussion about self-esteem and the unacceptability of physical punishment and humiliation. The facilitators reported differences within the group about the use and effectiveness of physical punishment. They noted that participants retained a respectful demeanour toward each other when disagreeing.

3.3.9.2 Spring 2003 Group

3.3.9.2.1 Participants

Mothers were provided with the pamphlet “Discipline without Hurting” in Spanish to read before this session. Although very few read the pamphlet before the session, during the session they found it “very helpful and easy to read.” In the end of session feedback, all mothers mentioned either learning about discipline or liking “everything.” Two highlighted learning “how to discipline my children without using physical punishment,” quoting the pamphlet title: “discipline without hurting.”

The participants' responses about specific methods are listed in Table 28 in the order in which they were reported most used at the end of NF.²¹

Table 28. Participants' Methods to Help Child Learn Acceptable Behaviour (Spring 2003 Group)

Methods used by mothers according to frequency at the end of NF*	Mean Before**	Mean After**
Explaining what to do (<i>n</i> =13)	6.0	6.4
Distracting or redirecting (<i>n</i> =8)	5.8	6.6
Making fair and simple rules (<i>n</i> =13)	4.7	5.2
Rewarding (<i>n</i> =14)	4.9	5.1
Problem solving (<i>n</i> =11)	5.5	5.3
Planning ahead (<i>n</i> =13)	5.6	4.8
Offering limited choices (<i>n</i> =10)	5.2	4.5
Ignoring (<i>n</i> =12)	3.6	3.3
Time out (<i>n</i> =9)	3.2	2.7

*Means are from the paired samples T-test; the number varies for each item depending on the number responding both pre- and post-program.

**1=never; 2=almost never; 3=once a month; 4=1-2 times a week; 5=several times a week; 6=once a day; 7=several times a day

Overall, about half the methods were used more over the course of the program. There were no statistically significant increases or decreases. Those that increased the most were: “distracting or redirecting”, “making fair and simple rules” and “explaining what to do”.

Making fair and simple rules, redirecting (distracting) and ignoring are promoted in “Discipline without Hurting.” This may explain why making fair and simple rules and redirecting showed a slight increase, while others decreased in their frequency of use. However, it does not explain why ignoring showed a decrease. Another possible explanation for the apparent pre-post difference might be that fair and simple rules and redirecting might be used more than problem solving due to the ages of the children of spring group members. As well, some methods are more desirable and less intrusive. For example, distracting and explaining might be used more frequently than time out because they promote positive parent-child interaction.

No significant differences were found in the use of methods in relation to the parents' time in Canada, as was found in the fall groups; however the numbers in the spring group were small.

²¹ The question about discipline methods was worded differently from that in the fall because the information collection was pre-post in the spring. Although the items formed a reliable scale pre- and post-program, differences were not statistically significant.

All parents reported that Newcomer Families helped them learn new ways to teach their children acceptable behaviour (mean of 6.35 of 7, “very much”; 79% rated 6 or 7: “very much”; another two—14% rated 5 and one—7% rated 4). One mother wrote in the parent survey: “... I learned new methods that I am going to use.”

3.3.9.2.2 Facilitators

Facilitators noted in the debriefing form how much participants appreciated learning about “what is wrong with physical punishment” and about alternatives, for example:

In a discussion cycle [the mothers] provided additional reasons to why physical punishment is wrong and provided examples of their own on outcomes to the children as a result of physical punishment. A few mothers recalled that their parents employed violent means to discipline them. These mothers stressed that despite being raised in this way, they do not employ violence with their children.

Another mother shared her violent childhood experience. This mother feels very strongly that there are other ways in disciplining her child; i.e.: talking, time out, the mother giving herself space, etc., as she had a traumatic childhood due to violent disciplining as she grew up.

On the other hand, some mothers were not certain alternatives would always work:

[What to do if] the child does not stop misbehaving.... The mothers responded very positively to her question as some suggested other ways of discipline; others felt that sometimes it’s necessary to give light spanking in order to let the child know that they are serious, and others supported one another’s opinions. At that point, we reviewed the positive ways of disciplining and its impacts as opposed to using physical punishment.

3.3.9.3 **Summary and Discussion**

Methods to help children learn acceptable behaviour were covered to help mothers learn about alternatives to physical punishment. A number of mothers indicated they were uncomfortable with the physical punishment that had been part of their childhood experience and were very pleased to learn alternatives.

Most learned new methods of discipline, according to their survey responses. Those in the fall group reported using encouragement, when... then, problem solving and limited choices. In the spring group, mothers’ choices reflected the younger ages of the children as well as the curriculum content. Explaining what to do, distracting or redirecting, and making fair and simple rules were most used at the end of the spring group and the use of these methods appeared to increase slightly from before to the end of the program, while some others decreased slightly.

In the fall groups, participants who had been in Canada longer used the method “planning ahead” more frequently. It is not clear why those in Canada longer would have picked up this particular method more than others.

3.3.10 Dealing with Difficult Peers

This topic is related to school discipline, as well as parenting skills and child development. It is covered near the end of the curriculum.

3.3.10.1 Fall 2002 Groups

3.3.10.1.1 Participants

In the parent survey, mothers reported learning how to help their child deal with difficult peers:

*It taught me how I can help him to solve problems he may have with other children....
(Toronto parent survey)*

... doing at home the kinds of things we have learned here allows for providing good role modeling for them (Toronto parent survey)

[It helped]... to explain different strategies for my son to solve conflicts with other children (Vancouver parent survey)

[What we learned about conflict] ... has provided guidelines for us (Montreal parent survey).

In the parent survey, all mothers reported they had learned some about helping their children with peer conflict: over two thirds rated their learning very high (50% rated 6-7; another 19% rated more than “somewhat,” a 5; and 20% felt they had learned “somewhat,” 4). Mothers who found speaking English or French more difficult were less likely to report learning about peer conflict ($p=.026$): 27% of those with difficulties in speaking English or French ($n=11$) reported the program taught “very much”, compared with 73% of those for whom English or French was easy ($n=15$).

Montreal mothers were least likely to report they had learned how to help their children deal with difficult peers ($p=.001$). The Montreal mean rating was 3.7 ($n=11$), compared with 6.1 for Vancouver ($n=14$) and 5.7 for Toronto ($n=7$). Some Vancouver mothers requested more information and discussion about this topic, especially bullying.

3.3.10.1.2 Facilitators

In Montreal, the topic of school discipline and bullying resulted in a problem-solving discussion with one participant who had not been successful in solving the problem of her son being bullied at school.

The Toronto facilitators noted that the mothers did not feel comfortable role-playing. As well, some did not understand the idea of peer pressure and wanted to continue talking about their own children’s behaviour rather than how to help their children deal with others. This may be related to the younger age of the children.

3.3.10.2 Spring 2003 Group

This topic was not covered due to lack of time. Participants generally did not respond to this question on the parent survey.

3.3.10.3 Summary and Discussion

The mothers welcomed the opportunity to learn more about how to help their children deal with the problem behaviour of other children, especially bullying. Because this topic was generally covered near the end of NF, it sometimes got less time than planned or, in the spring group, was not included at all. Where the topic was covered, the mothers learned strategies to help their children, although some, especially those with older children, requested further information and discussion.

3.3.11 Children's Rights and Child Protection

To promote a better understanding of Canadian expectations of parents, the curriculum includes children's rights and the protection of children, including the child welfare laws and agencies.

3.3.11.1 Participants

In the program, mothers indicated that they liked learning about the child protection laws and agencies, especially as noted in the end of session feedback for Toronto and Vancouver. In the survey 76% of the mothers said they learned "very much" (rated 6-7) about role of children's aid societies, and 88 % learned the same about child protection laws. One parent commented:

I am no longer fearful ... [about a complaint being made]. We now know that we will be given the opportunity to give our side of the story before..... We always want what is best for our children. It's true that I used to spank my kids, but now I won't do it anymore because I know it's not the best thing to do. But now I know that they're here to help and not necessarily to take away our kids. (Toronto parent group interview)

A number of mothers had very clear ideas of how to handle a contact with the children's aid society if a complaint were made:

I would get information about the complaint, but first I would speak with my son and ask him what happened. (Montreal parent group interview)

I would invite them to my home, I would talk to them in my own grounds, without fears, I have nothing to hide.... (Montreal parent group interview)

I believe it is important to talk with your child, to identify the problem because sometimes as mothers we don't see the problems our children see, to find the problem and then to seek specialized help. (Montreal parent group interview)

.... you ask them to come and see what is going on, because if they are invading my privacy it is better for them to see that nothing is going on and people cannot just go on denouncing anybody. (Montreal parent group interview)

When asked what they would do if their child telephoned 911 with complaints about their parents' behaviour, mothers responded thoughtfully and with a range of ideas:

I believe that I will have to assess how serious my actions were to justify my daughter's decision. I believe this has to be a very serious issue to make your child to do something like this. (Montreal parent group interview)

I believe if I didn't come to this program, I would have punished my son. I would have reacted differently, I would have spanked him, but now I think differently. Now, I would ask him first what did I do wrong to make him take such decision, and talk to him. (Montreal parent group interview)

First I will shut off the phone, all the phones and talk with my son, unless this is a very serious situation, but I don't think so.... Mothers are never this extreme. I believe if the child receives some kind of punishment, it is because he needed it—not physical punishment; children have rights here. (Montreal parent group interview)

It would be very painful for me to know that my son is doing something like this, but I will try to talk with him, to know the reasons. (Montreal parent group interview)

I too have a friend who said that her daughter called 911, but she said that she dialled on her behalf. She had spanked her, but the girl said it wasn't serious. I believe that there is a need to talk with the child if the case is serious to call 911, but one cannot get involved in a manipulation.... (Montreal parent group interview)

3.3.11.1.1

Facilitators

Vancouver and Toronto facilitators reported that this topic received intense and active discussion in the sessions in which it was included.

3.3.11.2 Spring Group

3.3.11.2.1 Participants

As in the fall, in the parent group interview mothers were asked how they would respond if a complaint were made to the children's aid society about their treatment of their children:

I would tell them to come to my home and see what is going on.

I would invite them to my home so they can see how we live and talk to each other, eat, etc, so they can spend time in my home and see, anytime.

Similarly, mothers also responded about what they would do if their child called 911 to complain of their behaviour:

I do not believe it is this easy, I mean that he does it. Unfortunately, you love your child very much but in case he threatens to call the police it means there is a problem.

... we have to talk with the authorities and demonstrate that he has not been abused or that nothing bad has happened, that we are trying to educate him and he becomes stubborn and doesn't want to obey. I would attempt to demonstrate that he is stubborn.

... that is a problem because there is not communication between parent and child. A mother treats the child with lots of affection.... But nobody is perfect and he calls the police. I won't allow it because I don't mistreat my son.... Therefore, I would say that I do not deserve it because I do not mistreat him.

3.3.11.2.2 Facilitators

This topic was well covered and participants had a very active discussion. One mother concerned about her daughter's safety with other relatives was provided with advice and information about legal resources.

3.3.11.3 Summary and Discussion

Learning about the systems for protecting children in Canada was important to the mothers because they are likely to be different from those in their home countries. They reported a better understanding of Canadian expectations as well as the community resources available to support families in need. Specifically, the mothers better understood children's rights and the role of the child protection agencies. Many became less concerned about potential contact with these agencies and began to see them as helping organizations. As noted in the previous sections, mothers told stories about their experiences of exercising their rights to communication with school personnel.

4. Conclusions

The conclusions are organized under five headings: curriculum, participant characteristics, participant satisfaction, participant outcomes and the evaluation. The overall conclusions are **bolded** in each section.

4.1 Curriculum

To be responsive to participants' needs and the facilitators' experiences as they delivered the program, the NF curriculum was a work in progress. Much of the curriculum was delivered as planned. When changes were made during the fall groups they were generally for one of two reasons:

- The groups' desire to move into the subjects group members were most interested in—the Canadian education system, especially school readiness, relationships with schools and teachers, and
- the limited time for presentation and discussion of topics.

Moving the school-related subject matter forward by combining some topics and eliminating some activities and extending the planned time per session addressed the primary difficulties identified during the fall groups.

For the spring group, where the focus was on mothers with preschool children, the curriculum developers heeded the judgement of the facilitators that the program was more appropriate for mothers of school-aged children than for those with preschoolers. The curriculum was modified for the spring group to focus on helping these mothers prepare their children for school and become more involved in their children's education.

The current curriculum as planned and substantially implemented in the spring appears to have the elements necessary for successful delivery. However, it has not been tested with parents with young school-age children, that is, the majority of the NF participants in the fall groups. It needs minor tinkering to refine the final content, order of topics, time needed and balance of time allocated to individual topics, especially during the last half.

Specifically decisions are needed about whether and how several topics will be included: Improving the Responsiveness of Schools, Helping Children Deal with Difficult Peers, Children with Exceptional Needs and Special Education, Experience with Bias, Children's Homework, Report Cards and Levels of Government and Elections. These topics could be considered optional and included where participants and facilitators determine they are a priority. If they are optional, future facilitators need to be able to make informed judgements about the inclusion of these topics, so information about a logical placement in the curriculum, the amount of time required and relevant materials will be needed.

Other findings are important to future revisions and implementation of the NF curriculum:

- Facilitators felt strongly that the curriculum needs to be translated into Spanish before program delivery.
- Many participants liked the homework but some did not. It was particularly well used and appreciated in some groups. There may have been a difference in the style of the facilitators in how homework was presented as well as the attitudes and time of the participants in their use of homework. The approach taken in the spring appeared to be successful—facilitators made clear that homework was not required but that it did have value for helping parents to increase their understanding and skills.
- The activities and handouts were generally appropriate and appreciated by facilitators and participants. More are needed, especially culturally appropriate videos, films and other visual aids using current technology.
- The time per session for the spring group, 2-2.5 hours, made it more possible to have adequate presentation and discussion time for most topics, and the topics were more frequently covered as planned.

Overall, the participants and facilitators found the curriculum to be relevant to the target group of newcomer Latin American mothers. With adjustments for different children's age groups, it is very appropriate and portable for use in a variety of settings accessible to newcomer families. It has the structure, activities and materials necessary for implementation by facilitators with some group work experience and familiarity with the needs and concerns of newcomers to Canada.

4.2 Participants' Characteristics and Needs

The mothers who attended the NF groups generally had between one and three children, the majority of whom were under age eight. They came to Canada recently—a large majority had been in Canada less than five years and half less than three years. These mothers were the target group for the program implemented in the fall and spring—newcomer Latin American mothers with young children who had some or no school experience.

In addition to being newcomers to Canada with young children, the mothers in NF groups were further isolated from the mainstream by:

- Their limited English or French—only one fifth spoke the language of their children's school
- Low income—nine out of ten had incomes below the Canadian Low Income Cut-off, and
- Limited support for parenting—in addition to having left behind extended family members, one quarter were single parents, nearly one half reported no help with their children, and one in ten had no help or advice about parenting.

Those who did not complete the program in the fall had been in Canada a shorter time, had lower education and lower income. This significant difference suggests that there are even more isolated mothers in need of the program who may have difficulty using it. Additional support and outreach might be needed to enable mothers like them to become and stay involved.

In conclusion, the NF program attracted and generally retained mothers who represented the target group for the program. Judging from the response of the participants and the outcomes found in this evaluation, the program is responding to the needs of this group for information and skills to help them improve their children's chances of success in school.

4.3 Participant Satisfaction

NF participants' satisfaction was evident in their survey and focus group responses and in their attendance. An average of 85% of registered mothers attended at each session, with over half of participants attending 90% or more of the sessions. Discussion in all groups was very active. In particular, mothers shared their feelings and experiences about immigration and its impact on parenting, children's development, school readiness and school relationships.

The evaluation results, especially from the qualitative information, showed that mothers' satisfaction with the program was related to learning about topics of importance to them: their children's development and how to improve children's school success. Their learning about school structures and their rights helped them to see how they had a role in their children's education. The mothers also explained that they appreciated the opportunity to speak Spanish in meetings with other women who had similar experiences. It seems likely that conducting the groups in the participants' home language contributed to their comfort and satisfaction—they were better able to understand and participate.

Participants were very pleased with the staff and generally with their discussions with other mothers, as well as the subject matter. Their feedback indicated that the program logistics (time of day, location, etc.) were quite acceptable to them.

The primary concern of NF participants was about the limited time. They wanted more—more in-depth coverage of some topics, additional topics and more discussion time. Another concern expressed by a very few mothers in one group was with the group dynamics and dominance of discussion by a few participants.

Participants' overall satisfaction with NF was very high. They liked the program content, opportunities for discussion and the way NF was delivered. They benefited from the program being conducted in Spanish by interacting more fully in the groups.

4.4 Participant Outcomes

The mothers in NF groups affirmed the benefits of the program and its impact on their knowledge and behaviour through their written and oral communication. This section draws conclusions about NF's short-term outcomes and other benefits as well as the overall value of the program as assessed by participant mothers.

4.4.1 Short-term Outcomes

The conclusions and relevant evidence about the achievement of each of the short-term outcomes (listed in the box, right) follow.

Mothers increased their use of informal and formal supports.

By the end of NF, most mothers were getting support for their parenting in several ways:

- Through the NF group: mothers described how they benefited from their mutual sharing and learning from others with similar experiences, even though few specifically mentioned group members as sources of support. This sharing was most often mentioned with regard to cultural adaptation, child development and school relationships.
- Through discussions with others: mothers increased their discussions about parenting. By the end of the groups, they were talking with others more than before the groups (a statistically significant increase), and one quarter to one half talked about parenting more frequently than their once-a-week group participation.
- From formal supports: mothers learned about community resources, a statistically significant increase in their knowledge. Evidence of their interest in learning about and using these resources continued throughout the program as they brought in information to share with other participants.

Short Term Outcomes
Parents learn how to...
• Form social support networks and find needed community resources
• Support their children's healthy social and emotional development
• Recognize the role of culture in child development
• Prepare their children for success in school
• Understand and relate to Canadian ECE, school & social service systems, including: expectations of parents, becoming involved in children's education & benefiting from these services
• Know and understand their rights in relation to child care, school & social service systems.

Almost all mothers had some support for their parenting from family and friends at both the beginning and the end of the groups; a few gained support they did not have before. The number and types of sources for each mother did not change substantially over the course of the program.

Overall, while the quantitative survey information did not identify that mothers specifically learned how to form social networks, the qualitative evidence of a continuing group and the mutual support described by most mothers indicate that mothers in the NF groups recognized the importance of social networks and increased their social support.

Mothers learned about children's healthy development and how to promote it; they started to use activities with their children.

Mothers learned about child development, especially social, emotional and language development, the role of play in children's learning and parents' role in promoting development. Although there were some differences among the fall group locations, all reported learning in these areas.

Although the spring group reported less satisfactory parent-child relationships at the end of the program, this may be related to NF's facilitating mothers' reflection on their relationships with their children and their efforts to apply their learning. On the other hand, mothers were less likely to report frustration with their children's questions at the end of NF. Mothers commented on changes in their interactions, including increased patience. This evidence suggests better understanding of children's needs and how children learn and develop.

Most mothers reported learning some new methods of discipline through NF. Those learned in the spring were: explaining what to do, distracting, redirecting and making fair and simple rules. In the fall groups, mothers reported using a wide range of methods, including encouragement, when... then, problem solving and limited choices.

NF raised awareness about the use of physical punishment and its detrimental effects—that is, the cycle of violence. Although not all mothers agreed that physical punishment is detrimental, parents may be able to experience success in using the new strategies they learned so that they become self-reinforcing and take the place of negative methods.

As one aspect of helping mothers promote their children's social development, helping children learn how to deal with difficult peers was important to mothers with older children. In the fall groups, the mothers indicated that the curriculum conveyed strategies they could use to help their children deal with their peers and some asked for more information.

The curriculum raised the question of gender differences and attempted to explore mothers' attitudes about parenting boys and girls. While the findings about parents' treatment of boys and girls were inconclusive, there was qualitative evidence suggesting mothers were more thoughtful about gender differences at the end of NF than at the beginning.

Overall, the mothers clearly understood more about how to encourage and support their children's development and they offered evidence of how they applied their learning.

The majority of mothers recognize the role of culture in their childrearing and reported learning and using "Canadian ways" to promote their children's development and school readiness.

Differences between the mothers' culture and the predominate Canadian culture was an ongoing theme in NF groups. Early in the curriculum mothers reflected on the impact of immigration and adaptation on their parenting. The majority of mothers felt their culture affected their childrearing practices, for example, their views about the development of independence. However, some indicated that they felt that culture does not play a role. Some mothers have not changed their basic parenting practices. However, almost all learned Canadian strategies to promote their children's development and agreed that it is important to share information about their culture with their children's teachers.

While not all the mothers agreed that culture plays a role in child development and child rearing, NF appeared to help heighten the awareness of all the mothers in NF groups about cultural impacts on parenting and convey ways for parents to help their children learn.

Mothers learned how to prepare their children to be successful in school.

A high proportion of mothers learned and initiated activities to help their children prepare for school, including talking, telling stories and reading with their children. There is evidence that these changes are the result of mothers' participation in NF. Mothers also feel more confident in interacting with their children in Spanish because many learned that this helps their language development. These changes make it more likely that children will be well prepared for school.

Consistent with their learning and applying child development knowledge, the mothers in NF learned about and put into practice activities to help their children be ready for school and/or be more successful at school.

Mothers learned about the structures and services of Canadian systems related to children and families, in particular how to relate to schools.

By the end of NF mothers knew more about how their local education system was structured and governed; the special services available for children, including school professionals, special education and Spanish-speaking community advisors, workers and interpreters; who to approach about what services; and the differences between the Catholic and public school boards. Specifically, all mothers better understood how to get special help if their children needed it, a statistically significant change.

Mothers also became more familiar with Canadian approaches to teaching, including the expectations of children to be assertive and of parents to become involved in their children's education. They reported gaining skills and confidence in relating to teachers, for example, how to approach them if they want to discuss problems in addition to the parent-teacher interviews.

Mothers with older children especially gained a better understanding of the process of assessing children's progress and reporting to parents. They continued to express some confusion about report cards and why unclear terminology about children's progress is used. However, they learned about the teaching rationale and schools' expectations for homework. Many specifically cited a better understanding of how to promote their children's completion of homework and help them develop good study habits. Some provided examples of changes in how their children did their homework. Those with children just beginning school and those whose children were about to start school expressed appreciation for the information that they need at that time.

The curriculum included the structure of child care services as well as other social services. Mothers developed an understanding that school and child care organizations are generally separate and, if they are involved in both, they need to talk with staff of both organizations. As noted in relation to social support, mothers learned about the many resources available to them as parents of young children and families in need, and how to get those services.

Mothers are more likely to be able to promote their children's success in school following NF. They know more about what is expected of themselves and their children in the Canadian education system and how to communicate with teachers and principals. They understand how to navigate the structure and access services. They are more aware of how child care and other community resources are structured and how they can use and communicate with these resources. They feel it is important to share information about their culture with their child's teachers.

Mothers learned about their own and their children's rights and how use them.

The program's intent to help participants understand their rights as parents in the Canadian education and social service systems was achieved to the degree possible in the short ten-session program. The mothers learned they were entitled to talk with teachers and principals at their children's school, about their children's education, progress and difficulties, whether they are educational or social. They felt more confident about asking for special help for their children and participating in decisions about their children's school placement.

Mothers generally expressed a greater understanding about their children's rights and the role of the child welfare agencies in protecting children and supporting families in Canadian society. While some expressed dissatisfaction with the possibility that police or the child welfare agency could investigate their parenting practices, a number gave examples that indicated they felt more confident about dealing with such intervention should it take place.

Mothers' overall increased understanding of Canadian systems includes an appreciation of their own rights to communication and to be treated fairly and their children's rights to be free from physical violence and neglect. They better understood the multiple roles of child welfare agencies and showed more confidence in dealing with various Canadian educational and social systems.

Most short-term objectives of NF were achieved in the implementation of the program.

Overall, mothers in NF groups:

- increased their communication with others about their parenting practices and how their adaptation to Canada affected their parenting
- learned about children's social, emotional and language development and how to support it including specific discipline methods. They became more thoughtful in considering how their culture affected their parenting practices. They put into practice what they had learned or intensified their efforts to promote their children's development and readiness for school. Most described increased understanding and patience with their children
- learned about the Canadian systems and laws related to children—schools, child care, social services and other community services, children's rights and child protection

- developed skills to interact and communicate effectively with child-related Canadian systems.

Some short-term objectives were not fully achieved. The following aspects of the NF curriculum need further attention because their achievement of the short-term outcomes is less clear: the role of culture and gender in child development and child rearing; parent–child interaction; helping children deal with difficult peers in supporting their development; and the formation of social networks within NF.

In conclusion, these results are evidence that NF was able to convey the two priority messages to the participating mothers: that parents can have a positive impact on their children’s socio-emotional development and on their school experience.

I’m generally happy [with NF] because ... I feel that I am a more accomplished mother, since I’m involved in my daughters’ education, not just what happens in the home.
 --Parent group interview

4.4.2 Intermediate-term Benefits

The NF program appears to have been most successful in increasing participants’ knowledge about parenting roles in child development and in school success, including promoting children’s readiness for school and enhancing parents’ involvement in their children’s education. This finding suggests that the program has the capacity to achieve the longer-term outcomes:

- improved parent effectiveness
- improved parental ability to prepare and support children to be successful in school, and
- appropriate interaction with Canadian education, child care and social service systems.

Mothers gained confidence from using the information and skills learned in NF; some reported feeling more empowered to advocate for their children with schools and other resources. The evaluation also found evidence that some mothers conveyed their learning to other family members to develop a more cohesive family approach to their children’s education.

4.5 Evaluation

The evaluation of NF was designed to contribute to the ongoing development of the program as well as to identify whether program objectives and outcomes were being achieved. By providing a preliminary report following the fall groups, including analysis of the process and outcome of the fall NF groups, the evaluation contributed to the evolution of the curriculum to better meet the needs of participants.

The evaluation was relatively successful in assessing the program process. Its effectiveness in providing information about participant outcomes would likely have been enhanced through the use of pre-post program information collection from participants—a stronger research design. However, participants were very clear in their post-program feedback in their views about what they learned.

With regard to the parent survey, specific questions require further examination and development if the survey is to continue to be used. For example, the question about how culture affects child rearing could benefit from revision. In the next iteration, it would be better to use an open-ended question such as: “Do your Latin American values affect the way you raise your child? If so, how?” Responses to this question at the end of the program would be expected to show some understanding of the interaction between culture and child rearing. It may be that an effective scaled question could later be developed using participants’ responses from this open-ended question. Similarly, further exploration of the impact of gender on child development and child rearing is needed to develop effective questions related to the different treatment of girls and boys and the impact of culture on this aspect of parenting. Until that is done, open-ended questions are most likely the best option.

The group facilitators conducted the parent group interview/focus group for the fall and spring groups. This approach was chosen to capitalize on the group rapport with the facilitators. As a result participants may have been more comfortable in their interactions in the group interview but reluctant to be critical of the program or the facilitators’ effectiveness. Ideally, an external facilitator would conduct a focus group/group interview. It would be helpful to use this approach in future to determine whether different types and quality of information are elicited.

Collection of information from the facilitators has been extensive, including session debriefing forms, mid-curriculum and end of curriculum questionnaires and interviews. Facilitators also had the responsibility of collecting participant information including registration forms, end of session feedback and group interviews at the end of the program. In effect, the facilitators became researchers, reflecting on their experience in piloting the curriculum and contributing to its modification, as well as collecting information.

On an ongoing basis all this information is not likely to be needed in the depth it has been collected. However, the topics covered in each session and some record of participant response would be important for regular program monitoring to ensure that curriculum topics are being included or, if not, thoughtful decisions are made to exclude topics. Satisfaction, benefit and outcome evaluation information from participants is most meaningful when information about program process is also available for analysis. Both are needed for ongoing monitoring, but for future groups the current information collection can be more focused and streamlined. It would be most useful to collect information primarily about the areas the curriculum developers and facilitators have questions. Pre-post information collection would be most effective in identifying participants’ specific learning.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations focus on NF’s target group, the curriculum, program delivery and the evaluation.

5.1.1 Target Group

1. Continue to offer and adapt the program in response to the needs of newcomer families; consider its application to other at-risk families and those with special needs, for example,

families involved with child welfare agencies and parents of children with exceptional learning needs

2. Continue to deliver NF in other language groups and settings across Canada
3. Consider how families who are most at risk due to stressors such as low education, income and a short time in Canada can be supported to become involved and complete NF
4. Develop ways of conveying curriculum content to all family members, including fathers and grandparents.

5.1.2 Curriculum

5. Review these evaluation results in relation to the curriculum topics, considering the following:
 - the use of the curriculum with families who have children ranging from birth to age eight, and the optimal balance of content about school and school readiness vs. child care and early child development for participants depending upon their children's ages
 - the central core topics, especially Child Development, School Readiness, Relationships with Schools, School Structure, Social Support, Immigration and Adaptation
 - the selection of other topics as optional to be included depending on participants' interests and the ages of their children, including Children's Homework, Report Cards, Helping Children Deal with Difficult Peers, Improving the Responsiveness of Schools, Levels of Government and Elections
 - variations in program time in different settings, including the length and number of sessions
 - guidance that might be offered facilitators as to how to plan sessions to ensure that topics are covered to meet participants' needs and address their interests
6. Prepare and make available for extensive distribution (paper and electronic) an NF program manual including the curriculum, related materials and evaluation protocols and forms
7. Locate or design more technologically sophisticated and culturally appropriate materials to supplement the existing materials, including audio-visual resources.

5.1.3 Program Delivery

8. Address specific program delivery logistics such as:
 - Ensure translation of the curriculum and resource materials to the language of program delivery before implementation
 - Clarify and confirm resources needed for program delivery:
 - i. facilitator time to implement NF, considering the program time and adequate set-up and close down time, as well as tasks such as contacting participants between sessions and arranging for guest speakers

- ii. child care time and resources, considering the ages of the children, needed staff-child ratios, and transition time for parents to drop-off, settle and pick up their children.

5.1.4 Evaluation

- 9. Enhance the evaluation design and quality of information collected by:
 - Using a pre-post design with the participant surveys to better capture change in attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and behaviour
 - Reviewing parent survey questions in areas where the findings were less clear, in order to better capture outcomes and benefits
 - Using external facilitators to conduct focus groups with participants to promote objectivity
- Determine the minimum requirements for continuing evaluation and monitoring now that NF has been successfully piloted.

6. Concluding Remarks

The results of this evaluation are evidence that NF was able to convey the two priority messages to the participating mothers: that parents can have a positive impact on their children's socio-emotional development and on their school experience. Parents learned that they can contribute to their children's development and education in important ways and promote their children's success in school.

Judging from the response of the participants and the outcomes found in this evaluation, the program is responding to the needs of this group for information and skills to help them improve their children's chances of success in school. There is more to be learned through continued implementation of NF in a variety of settings, ongoing improvement and adaptation of the curriculum to different participants and settings, and further evaluation of its effectiveness.

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