Abstract
Learning ecology frameworks (Barron, 2006) depict the learner self-initiating understanding and applying content through multiple, dynamic social interactions and contexts. Although parents are known to use a variety of information sources to learn about parenting (e.g., Hart Research, 2009), little studied is how sources are used in a complementary way, or representative of a learning ecology. Using mixed methods analysis this study identifies parent learning resources inclusive of parent education participation, relationship dynamics that characterize the ecology, and provides evidence of cross-boundary learning. Implications for further study and for parent engagement in learning are offered.

Research Questions
• With whom and where do parents learn about parenting?
• How do these sources vary by relationship quality?
• Is there evidence that parent learning is cross-boundary?

Method
• Mixed methods (survey and focus group discussions) were employed to collect data from parents of young children (Birth to 5 years) who attend an Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program in an urban school district (n=65 across both methods).
• Focus group interviews were coded and analyzed (using Atlas. Ti 7) to determine persons and locations for parent learning, types of support, relationship quality and evidence of cross-boundary learning.
• Frequency analysis was applied to quantitative survey data with the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

Results

Figure 1: Parent Learning Ecology
This figure shows that parents acquire parenting information through several contexts and sources including ECFE (parent educator and class), other parents (e.g. coworker), home (co-parent and child), professionals, family, friends, and the media (books, Internet). Sources vary by the number of types of information provided (e.g., health, behavior).

Figure 2: Parent Learning Ecology with Relational Quality
This figure shows that individuals used for information, vary in terms of their relational quality with parents, and offer differential types of support. Co-parents, friends, and family, (i.e., with whom parents have intimate relationships) provide multiple supports (emotional, practical, and informational), while professionals and the media provide singular support (informational). This suggests that parents will turn trusted, reliable and available sources for information because they are valued for other supports. And that programs, like ECFE, that foster emotional and practical support have added value beyond learning alone.

Figure 3: Cross-boundary Learning
This figure shows how learning occurs as parents act as conduits by bringing learning practices and knowledge across boundaries (i.e., sharing information to others from ECFE, sharing information from ECFE from personal experiences). This can reinforce understanding and application of information about childrearing and, through social relationships, strengthen the receipt of other social supports.

Implications
This study reminds parent educators and professionals who design and deliver parent education that participants are members of a rich social ecology used and valued for information and much more. Although information from the program is important for learning, parents’ self-directed interactions with multiple ecology members act to reinforce, elaborate and deepen understanding. Parent participation in programs such as ECFE should be viewed as part of a dynamic context of learning that is embedded in meaningful relationships and interactions with others. Parent learning may be fostered through capitalize on these relationships and to provide parents with ways to share information, bring in and apply information gathered external to the program.

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