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A Neighborhood Notion of Emergent Literacy: One Mixed Methods Inquiry to Inform Community Learning

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Abstract Using a convergent parallel mixed methods design, this study considered the early literacy and language environments actualized by childcare providers and parents of young children (ages 3–5) living in one large urban community in the United States of America. Both childcare providers and parents responded to questionnaires and participated in focus groups held at various community sites within the neighborhood. Using snowball sampling, 77 childcare providers and 149 parents responded to surveys that asked about their individual roles in children's emergent literacy development. Subsequently, several focus groups were held, ensuring childcare provider and parent representation from both center and home-based early childcare sites. Study questions considered the consistencies and inconsistencies in beliefs and actions by members of both community groups regarding early literacy development. Consistencies and inconsistencies were identified through a descriptive comparative analysis within and across survey and focus group data to guide the implementation of practical, ecological, research-based community learning that can be used as a model for other communities seeking to create similar communities of practice.

Keywords Community literacy practices · Early childhood · Mixed methods · Emergent literacy · Language development

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Introduction

Research has consistently endorsed the value of early language and literacy instruction (e.g., Cunningham and Stanovich 1997; Snow et al. 1995; Sulzby and Teale 1991). Although young children are not enacting traditional or conventional reading and writing, they are indeed in the process of becoming literate (Teale and Sulzby 1986). Emergent literacy is not 'pre-literacy' as there is no magical time when children become literate. Instead, young children are continually in the process of becoming literate through various activities and experiences. The quality of children's early literacy experiences are defined by the degree to which these experiences foster the development of early literacy and language skills (Morrow and Tracey 2007; Teale and Sulzby 1986; Whitehurst and Lonigan 2001), most often hinging on the quality of adult-child interactions (Pianta et al. 2009). Authentic and meaningful interactions in all early childhood settings are therefore critical to providing literacy and language experiences that afford children the foundational skills necessary to learn to read and write.

Just as these adult-child interactions are socially constructed and contextually bound, so too are beliefs and practices related to emergent literacy. The degree to which early literacy is supported in homes and childcare centers is contingent on parents' and childcare providers' beliefs about its appropriate place there (Sandvik et al. 2014). When childcare providers and parents approach literacy and language learning in a cohesive, consistent, and connected way, children who spend time across settings benefit (e.g., Bempechat 1998; Comer 1980). Parents who feel welcomed and teachers who feel supported serve to strengthen the bond between the two contexts, allowing both parents and teachers to see themselves as partners

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working towards the common goal of creating readers and writers. This study grew from the necessity to identify the consistencies and inconsistencies across and between childcare providers' and parents' conceptions of young children's early literacy and language learning to build a shared vision in the American urban neighborhood of Abra Park.[1]

The Abra Park Early Childhood Collaborative (APECC) was established in 2012 to combat the effects of systemic poverty influencing the early childhood experiences of Abra Park's youth. As literacy scholars at a nearby university, we initially became involved in the APECC as peripheral members interested in the organization's work to improve the community's early childhood support system, but subsequently took on leadership roles, as other members of the Collaborative turned to us for information about literacy and language development. In these leadership roles we were asked to facilitate literacy professional development for community members. However, in order to create an appropriate professional development plan for the Abra Park community, and build any necessary bridges between childcare providers and parents, we needed to garner a better understanding of their current conceptions of literacy and language. Our effort to better understand childcare provider and parent conceptions is the basis of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Perspective

Acknowledging that individuals are present in and affected by multiple systems simultaneously, and that none exist or operate in isolation, we approached this study from an ecological perspective. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model to illustrate this bidirectional relationship, we investigate the described literacy and language practices of two *microsystems*, specifically, children's homes and childcare settings. The interplay of multiple microsystems create a *mesosystem*. Our phenomenon of interest is the literacy learning of the children that bridge these two microsystems to create a mesosystem. In order to better understand this mesosystem, we first wanted to acquire a solid understanding of each microsystem involved. Therefore, we investigate the childcare providers' and parents' conceptions of their role and the role of each other in the literacy and language development of young children, towards creating a shared understanding of and approach to a common goal.

From a constructivist perspective, literacy and language development cannot be understood fully unless situated as socially constructed. The literate environment, specifically the interplay between home and childcare settings, is both socially constructed and influential in the social development of the child (Vygotsky 1962). "The single most compelling fact about literacy is that it is a *social* achievement" (Scribner 1984, p. 7, emphasis in original). Young children's literacy learning is a fundamentally social process that results from interactions between children and adults (Pianta et al. 2008). Vygotsky (1962, 1978) emphasizes that learning stems from social interactions and guided learning as children and learning partners (usually adults) construct knowledge together. The environment in which children grow up greatly impacts how children learn.

Cultural Considerations

The largest of 77 neighborhoods in one Midwest city in the United States of America, Abra Park has a long history of community activism. Neighborhood groups (such as in local churches or 'block clubs') continue to work towards greater economic and educational stability for community members. In recent years, Abra Park Coming Together (APCT) has gained momentum as a community organization that supports and facilitates collaborative action in areas such as early childhood, youth engagement, and an increased workforce. The Abra Park Early Childhood Collaborative (APECC) serves as the early childhood entity of APCT, and our involvement with the APECC facilitated this project. The APECC was created for and by parents, caregivers, childcare providers, teachers, and other Abra Park community members to help young children in the community thrive. As the organization grows, it continues to increase its understanding of the local lived experiences of children in early childhood settings by nurturing sustainable relationships with providers and parents in the community. Towards providing pertinent learning experiences for the community, the APECC is committed to using relevant data to understand all stakeholders' entry points when making decisions concerning future aims.

Present Study

We designed this study to (1) provide timely and relevant data about the conceptions of providers and parents regarding literacy and language development as useful to the APECC writ large, and (2) understand consistencies and inconsistencies between and within populations to inform the development of local provider and parent professional development. Hence, the scope of this study was limited to parents of children enrolled in childcare. It is

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[1] Abra Park, and all other names, are pseudonyms.

therefore possible that a study including parents of young children not enrolled in childcare would yield different results.

We used multiple methods to investigate childcare providers' and parents' conceptions about children's emergent literacy and language development. A Likert scale survey provided an avenue of entry into the literacy practices of the community, and was further informed by focus group conversations. Because the success of sustainable professional development hinges on a strong understanding of all stakeholders' points of entry, it is necessary to ask: *What are the current beliefs and actions of childcare providers and parents in the community regarding early literacy and language development*?

Methods

Study Design

In order to best capture the consistencies and inconsistencies in parents' and providers' conceptions of early literacy and language development and instruction, we employed a convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell et al. 2003). Multiple complementary data create a comprehensive understanding of the current context of early literacy and language development. Collected and analyzed concurrently yet separately, quantitative survey data and qualitative focus group data equally contributed to better answering the research question. The quantitative questionnaire data comprised of 42 Likert scale items that gauged participant beliefs and actions of emergent literacy in the community. The qualitative focus group data also contributed to better understanding parents' and providers' beliefs and actions of emergent literacy while also adding participant voices to the study. The study design mandated that the quantitative data and qualitative data come together at the point of interface (after the simultaneous collection of all data) for interpretation. When merging the results of all data, we looked for consistencies and inconsistencies between the data sources. To answer our research question, we identified participant responses from each community group as in line with existent emergent literacy research and/or in line with one another. Consequently, data findings are represented in four categories and are visually represented in the results section.

Beliefs and Actions

Both the quantitative and qualitative data contribute to better understanding participants' beliefs and actions. This study characterizes *beliefs* as what is considered appropriate ways to approach early literacy in early childhood settings as well as what perceived goals children need to accomplish in order to be prepared for their K-12 education. While all practitioners and parents often have definite ideas about preschool practices and outcomes regardless of context (Hatcher et al. 2012), the definition of what constitutes entering kindergarten 'prepared' will differ by community (Graue 2010). Therefore, this study concretely cements itself in the Abra Park neighborhood. These beliefs are critical to how adults approach interacting in emergent literacy activities with children as "beliefs influence their practices and, subsequently, their practices influence child outcomes" (Sandvik et al. 2014, p. 30); we refer to these practices as *actions*. It is clear that adult-child interactions play a large part in determining the emergent literacy development in children, specifically "the ways in which adults interact with them [preschool age children] to deliver developmentally stimulating opportunities" (Pianta et al. 2009, p. 50). Acknowledging the importance of these adult engagements, we use *actions* to describe how participants report the enactment of beliefs when interacting with young children.

Participants and Site

We used snowball sampling (Bernard 2011) to identify study participants, beginning with child care providers attending a professional development workshop about social and emotional learning, co-hosted by the Abra Park Childcare Providers Network and the APECC. Child care providers then referred us to parents interested in participating in the study. Initial recruitment took place at the first of the series of workshops. All survey participants were invited to participate in a focus group, and 32 parents and providers ultimately participated in the focus groups. The focus group interview protocol was developed before reviewing the survey results. Childcare provider and parent focus groups were conducted separately for both logistical reasons and in hopes that participants would feel able to speak more freely. However, interview questions were consistent between both groups.

Survey participants included childcare providers ($n = 77$) and parents ($n = 149$) representing both home-based ($n = 127$) and site-based ($n = 79$) childcare centers. Of the childcare provider participants who completed the demographic section of the survey ($n = 59$), 21 served as the sole childcare provider at their site, five were lead teachers or providers, 25 were assistant providers, five served as directors, one as assistant director, and two were additional support staff members. Childcare providers varied in their number of years of experience providing care in the Abra Park community. For seven of the respondents this was their first year in the profession. Ten providers had 2–5 years of experience, nine had

6–10 years of experience, 22 had 11–20 years of experience, and 11 providers have worked in childcare for over 21 years. The number of children at each site ranged from 1–60 and the age of children in their care ranged typically from 6 weeks to 6 years, although a few of the sites also offered after-school care for elementary aged children through age 12.

Parent participants (recruited by their childcare providers) who completed the demographic section of the survey ($n = 132$) included 97 mothers, 18 fathers, 14 grandparents, two other relatives, and one non-relative legal guardian. The average age of a child whose parents participated in the survey study was 3.31 and equally represented in gender (49 % male; 51 % female). Additional children in these families' homes ranged in age from 6 weeks to 11 years old. Of the children who attended daycare, 65 % of them spent 40 h or more in childcare per week; 15 % spent between 30–39 h; 0.5 % spent 20–29 h, and 13 % spent less than 20 h per week in childcare.

All study participants lived and/or worked in Abra Park at the time of the study. All focus group participants first completed a survey. Nearly 100 % of the parents and childcare providers who completed the survey were African American. All 32 focus group participants were African American females. Childcare provider focus groups were held at various community centers in Abra Park, while parent focus groups were held at different childcare center facilities in the neighborhood. It is noted that perhaps the most vocal, and correspondingly, confident, parents volunteered for the focus group and so the data may be reflective of this.

Quantitative Data Sources and Collection

Childcare providers and parents first responded to a modified *Parental Belief Inventory* (DeBaryshe and Binder 1994). Originally developed to measure parents' beliefs and actions about the goals and processes of reading aloud to young children, this 42-question survey has seven distinct subcategories. The Parental Belief Inventory (PBI) items form a single factor with high scores reflecting beliefs consistent with current theories of language acquisition and emergent literacy. Results of DeBaryshe and Binder's (1994) criterion-related validity indicate that parental beliefs are robust correlates of all aspects of family literacy. Belief scores were positively and significantly associated with parents' modeling of reading, with the variety and frequency of children's exposure to books, with children's interest in reading, and with parents' actual read-aloud strategies.

Although the survey items together form a single construct, analyzing results at the subcategory level was necessary as our goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of

where there is a differing of opinion between two different groups within the larger construct of emergent literacy. Looking at the subcategories enabled us to understand subtle differences between populations as well as where each subcategory aligned with current research. This, in turn, allowed for planning a more targeted professional development program instead of a less useful and more general approach to professional development.

The survey was adjusted to apply to both childcare providers and parents, resulting in two parallel surveys. DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) grouped the original 55 belief inventory items into seven a *priori* scales. Coefficients alpha were examined, and items with low item-total correlations were dropped from the scale, resulting in 42 remaining reliable items. In their analysis, five of the seven subscales exhibited adequate internal consistency, with a coefficient alpha greater than or equal to 0.70, whereas two subcategory demonstrated borderline to low coefficients alpha. We replicated this analysis for both the Parent Inventory and the modified Provider Inventory with similar results. The five subcategories with coefficients alpha greater than 0.70 for all three surveys were Affect, Participation, Resources, Knowledge, and Efficacy with the exception of Efficacy for the provider survey (alpha = 0.52). Identical to DeBaryshe and Binder's analysis, the Environment and Reading Instruction categories resulted in lower coefficients alpha.

Participants recorded their responses by reading an item and rating their opinion in Likert format, ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (4) Strongly Agree. Survey items were divided between negative and positive wording, resulting in the need to invert negatively worded responses prior to analyzing results. Overall results were calculated for each of the participating populations, and then within populations by subcategory. For each survey and subcategory, scores were averaged and converted into z-scores for further analysis. In addition to comparing means, a series of Kruskal–Wallis analyses (Vargha and Delaney 1998) were conducted to identify statistically significant differences (1) between and among the two populations and (2) between subcategory themes. See "Appendix" for all survey subcategory definitions and example items.

Qualitative Data Sources and Collection

In line with our constructivist view, the qualitative data collected through focus groups strengthened the voices of participants and provided a contextualized and comprehensive picture of the early literacy environments. We conducted voluntary focus groups with childcare providers and parents. In all, six focus groups were held. Focus groups lasted approximately an hour with a range of 4–8 participants in each. Focus groups spanned 10 weeks; both

authors facilitated five of the six focus groups while Emily facilitated the sixth focus group independently. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to concurrently maintain consistency across groups and allow for flexibility within each conversation based on participant comments. Interview items included questions such as: How does talking and listening help kids read and write? What is your role in getting kids ready to read and write in school? What gets in the way of you doing these things?, and What does the ideal parent/provider relationship look like?

After data collection was complete, we used modified grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2009) in an effort to most comprehensively understand childcare providers' and parents' approaches to literacy and language with the young children in their care. Open, axial, and selective coding were used to identify relevant themes regarding beliefs and actions, including and beyond those covered by the survey. When codes were organized and tabulated through collaborative discussion, there were clearly 14 codes developed that represented the most prevalently discussed topics. These 14 codes addressed participants' beliefs and actions regarding emergent literacy and are detailed in the Results section.

Results

In order to comprehensively discuss the results of both quantitative and qualitative data between both parents and childcare providers, the results follow in three sections. First, quantitative data are shared regarding the similarities and differences between the two community groups' survey responses, childcare provider responses as a whole, and parent responses as a whole. Then, qualitative data is presented as derived from the focus groups. Finally, in *Report of Results*, the quantitative and qualitative data are discussed in relation to each other.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Likert Survey Responses

We analyzed provider and parent survey responses comparatively in order to understand consistencies and inconsistencies in emergent literacy beliefs and actions. We compared survey response means for each subcategory for both provider and parent responses. These survey means show a striking similarity between the community groups' results, implying parallel responses from both childcare providers and parents throughout *much* of the survey. However, there are three subcategories where the responses between parent and childcare provider answers are statistically significant. These subcategories are: *teaching efficacy*, *resources*, and *reading instruction*. Table 1 displays

each survey subcategory mean by sample population and shows the significance level between childcare provider and parent responses. In the *teaching efficacy* subcategory, survey responses for parents are noticeably higher ($M = 3.61$) compared to the survey responses for providers ($M = 3.28$). Upon reviewing all individual items within each theme, *teaching efficacy* questions were the least malleable when translating questions from the original field-tested parent audience to a provider survey. For example, the parent item "I am my child's most important teacher" was similarly phrased on the provider survey, saying, "I am my students' most important teacher". It is worth considering that providers would not strongly agree with this statement since they too believe that parents are the child's most important teacher.

The other two subcategories with statistically significant differences, *resources* and *reading instruction*, require further investigation. It is therefore worth considering how each population would look at each subcategory differently. For example, childcare providers may need more resources for the amount of children they are caring for on a daily basis and may receive more continuing education regarding reading instruction for young children due to credential and licensure requirements. It is worth noting that a substantial number of childcare provider participants have over 10 years of experience in the early childhood field. Conversely, parents (whose experience with young children are often limited to the raising of their own) may have a different idea of what instructional resources are necessary for early literacy learning and rely on personal experiences for what constitutes beneficial reading instruction.

Also worth noting, in addition to the subcategories that vary by population are the noticeably higher means in five of the seven subcategories, with *environmental input* and *reading instruction* as the exceptions. Parent survey responses have lower means in the *environmental input* ($M = 2.74$) and *reading instruction* ($M = 2.46$) subcategories. When comparing provider survey responses to those of parents, provider responses in both *environmental input* ($M = 2.90$) and *reading instruction* ($M = 2.65$) are higher than those of parents but still noticeably lower than the provider responses in other subcategories. The Parental Belief Inventory defines *environmental input* as the malleability of language development, including items such as, "Some children are natural talkers, and others are silent. Parents do not have much influence over this." *Reading instruction* addresses the appropriateness of direct reading instruction, including items such as, "When we read, I have my child point out different letters or numbers that are printed in the book." The idea that adults don't have influence over children's emergent language and literacy development is consistent with the 'reading readiness'

Table 1 Mean item scores and significance levels of childcare provider and parent respondents

Subcategory	Providers M(SD)($n = 77$)	Parent M(SD)($n = 149$)	Significance level
Teaching efficacy	3.27 (0.93)	3.61 (0.69)	$p = 0.000$
Positive affect	3.46 (0.70)	3.50 (0.66)	$p = 0.416$
Verbal participation	3.62 (0.52)	3.52 (0.56)	$p = 0.100$
Knowledge base	3.49 (0.58)	3.51 (1.25)	$p = 0.953$
Resources	3.48 (0.62)	3.61 (0.57)	$p = 0.002$
Environmental input	2.90 (0.83)	2.74 (0.90)	$p = 0.072$
Reading instruction	2.64 (1.07)	2.45 (1.13)	$p = 0.000$

paradigm that held hold of American society until the late 1980s and is still customary in many neighborhoods. Reading readiness is the idea that children naturally became ready to learn to read once they matured to a certain developmental age or "neural ripeness", and educators should wait until that time arrived prior to trying to teach children (Teale and Sulzby 1986). If childcare providers and parents don't think they have influence over children's emergent language and literacy development, it seems consistent that they would not enact instructional activities with children. Therefore, the similar low means between *environmental input* and *reading instruction* is a logical one.

Provider and parent survey responses were also analyzed separately in order to gain a deeper understanding of emergent literacy knowledge within each sample population. The two subcategories with the lowest means overall, *environmental input* and *reading instruction*, also had large standard deviations across both populations. The subcategory with the largest standard deviation for providers is *reading instruction* ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.07$), followed by *teaching efficacy* ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.93$) and *environmental input* ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.83$). The subcategory with the largest standard deviation for parents is *knowledge base* ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.25$), followed by *reading instruction* ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.13$) and *environmental input* ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.90$). These results indicate the less malleable transition of *teaching efficacy* to provider survey items as well as a larger variance in how parents understand how knowledge is gained from books (referred to as the *knowledge base* subcategory). These results further indicate large variances in beliefs about the origins of language development, developmentally appropriate literacy instruction, and the necessity of direct instruction during adult-child read-alouds.

Further analysis was performed within each sample population to better understand the large standard deviations in certain subcategories. A Kruskal–Wallis analysis showed no statistically significant difference in provider responses when comparing employees of home-based or center-based sites. Center-based childcare providers are generally considered to have more access to professional

development opportunities than home-based providers who usually work in more isolated environments (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2002). However, the Abra Park Childcare Providers' Network (APCPN) works extensively to provide learning opportunities to early childhood employees across sites. This finding may be unique to the Abra Park community, and may indicate the success of the APCPN's mission. Similarly, a Kruskal–Wallis analysis showed no statistically significant difference in how parents of children in home-based or center-based sites responded to the survey. This lack of difference may also be a result of the APCPN's work within Abra Park, but further data are needed to confirm this assertion.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Provider and parent focus groups were conducted and coded separately from each other. Within the childcare provider focus group data, 20 codes were uniquely associated with participant language and literacy *beliefs* and 17 codes were uniquely related to participant language and literacy *actions*. 14 of the 51 codes were existent in both actions and beliefs, for example, language instruction was predominantly discussed, both in terms of beliefs (e.g., "I think kids need to learn new words") and in action (e.g., "We talk a lot with the children at our center"). Within the parent focus group data 20 codes were unique to parents' *actions* pertaining to literacy and language development with young children, 19 codes specifically address parent *beliefs* about literacy and language, and 11 of the 50 codes were present in both actions and beliefs. All codes represented were discussed in all focus groups.

While provider and parent focus groups were coded separately, a holistic review of these data provided opportunities to compare participant responses across sample populations. Both childcare providers and parents showed similarities and differences in their beliefs and actions regarding early literacy and language learning. Results show the sites of intersection when comparing parents' or providers' beliefs with their actions. Figure 1 shows the most prevalent 14 themes within and between populations, and graphically depicts commonalities. The
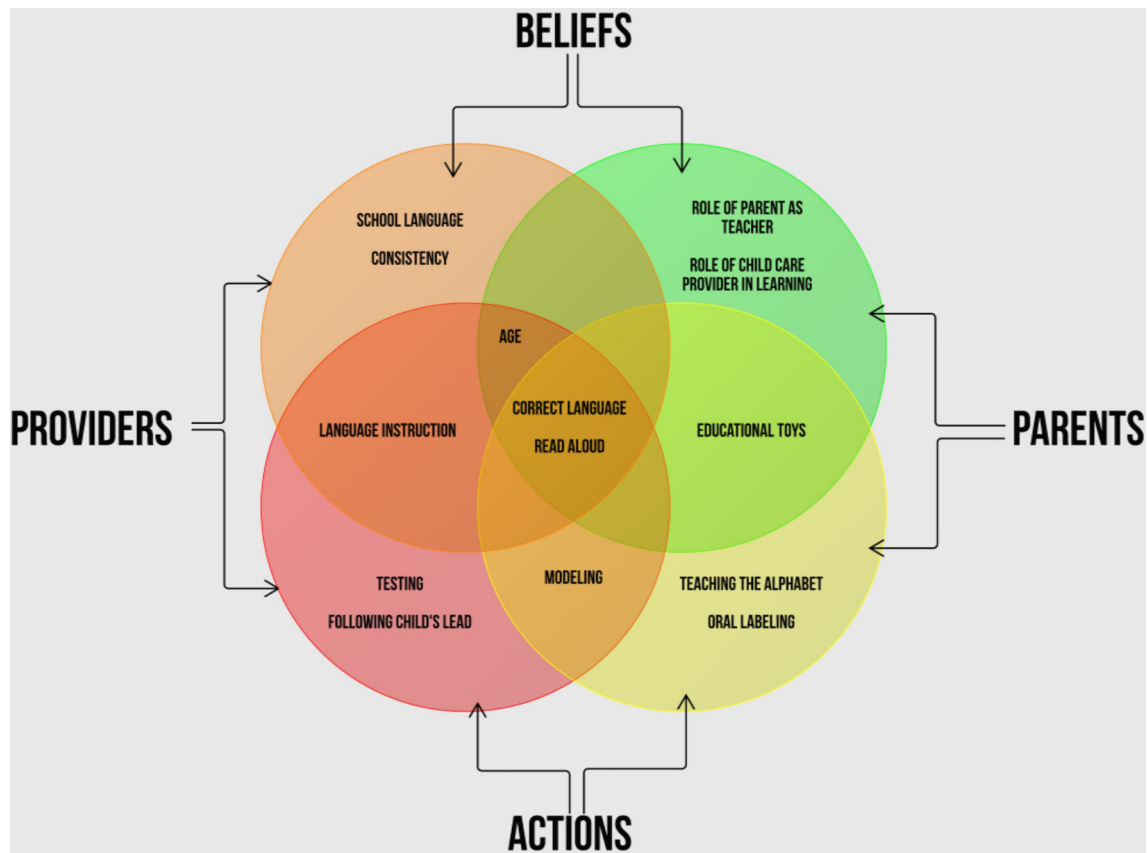
Fig. 1 Circles of overlap

figure is consequently unpacked through providing participant quotes that represent themes for beliefs, actions, and the overlap between beliefs and actions.

Themes for Beliefs

Providers emphasized that there is a type of language that should be spoken at school (*school language*), saying "…we promote the English that is taught in school. But, however, in the streets it might be a different language out there." Providers also noted the need for consistency in children's learning (*consistency*), saying "…not consistency throughout the way early childhood…. Everything is so different, the child is confused, you know. I'm going here and I'm doing this, and I'm going here and doing this. You know, so it should be the same."

Parents emphasized they primary role of parents as teachers (*role of parent as teacher*), saying "I'd rather me teach her something than someone else teach her something, especially if it's something that I am capable of doing." Parents also noted their belief that children learn and/or should learn at childcare settings (*role of childcare provider*), saying "We think the daycare is helping him to learn."

Themes for Actions

Providers stated how testing children in academic areas is something consistently enacted (*testing*), saying "I have my own little test that I made up to see where they are at that age. You know, I have guidelines and, what do you call it, scale of the children where they should be." Providers also discussed how they take children's interests into account when teaching (*following child's lead*), saying "You make it interesting for them, then they'll start loving it."

Parents identified how teaching letters or singing the ABCs was a specific skill of practice within the home (*teaching the alphabet*), saying "I know we're gonna sing your ABC song when we get home, I'm going to point to the letters." Parents also talk about the practice of labeling items, both within the environment and during book reading (*oral labeling*), saying "Just like walking around with her and pointing out things like saying names, like, even though I know she can't repeat it just, 'this is a cat, this is a TV,' things like that." Both providers and parents discussed the importance of demonstrating or showing children how to do literacy activities (*modeling*), saying

"…and I write a lot. You know, so, I try to be an example to them."

Themes that Overlap Between Beliefs and Actions

There are also themes that overlap between beliefs and actions. When providers discussed how *language instruction* should be/is taking place, both beliefs and actions appeared in the conversation. For example, when a provider shares how language instruction takes place and the importance behind such instruction, she says, "If you constantly repeat what you're saying, for example, if you're talking to a baby and they understand what you're saying after so many times, 'Oh, that's my signal for that,' they come up with 'ok, that's what she means.'"

Parent focus group discussions also showed an overlap expressing both beliefs and actions when sharing thoughts on *educational toys*. For example, when a parent shares the belief that her child needs certain toys and how that spurred her action, she says, "time I look for things for [child's name] like colors and shapes and… and… that's how I got her the shape and sorting puzzles and the big puzzles."

The middle of Fig. 1, where all the different circles overlap, is where parents' and providers' beliefs and actions all come together in focus group conversations. Parents and providers both talked about their beliefs of what is labeled *correct language* and *read aloud* as well as how they enacted these beliefs. Both populations stated that children should be and are having their language corrected, saying things such as, "When they come to school and you try to correct them and let them know that's not the proper what to say that word. That's the time that you do that." Both populations also stated that children should be and are read aloud to by adults, saying things such as, "I try to get books to reading to, not some time, any time, that they're there."

Reporting of Results

Quantitative and qualitative data sources provide a comprehensive view of childcare providers' and parents' beliefs and actions regarding early literacy learning within the Abra Park community. Survey results focused on the responses of individuals, identified unexpected commonalities between the two populations, and highlighted the lower means in both the *environmental input* and *reading instruction* subcategories. The focus groups allowed for community conversations, eliciting responses with the opportunity for validation or rebuttal by fellow providers or parents. Participants spoke of their own experiences in relation to and in comparison to one another, while discussing their interrelated roles. Nods of agreement, "um hums" of approval, and lots of "that's right," contributions

reaffirm that often what was said by one was believed by most, if not all of the participants in a particular session.

In order to more systematically synthesize the entire data set across quantitative and qualitative platforms for both childcare provider and parent participants, we visually represent the major data points in four quadrants which we refer to as the Community Choice Matrix (Whittingham & Hoffman 2016), to discuss where agreement between participant groups and agreement with existing research findings intersect. The Collaborative Choice Matrix (Fig. 2) provides an anchor to talk about the collective results of the study, when the childcare provider and parent quantitative and qualitative data are looked at together to describe the current beliefs and actions of the Abra Park community regarding early literacy and language development.

Starting with Quadrant IV, we can see many areas within the construct of emergent literacy where childcare providers and parents agree with each other and with the current research. The community sees a high *affective* value for reading aloud to children, enjoying reading and talking to children. Childcare providers and parents within Abra Park are committed to preparing children with early literacy skills through different activities such as *modeling* literate behaviors for children (e.g., how to write letters from left to right to form words), engaging in *read alouds,* and eliciting children's *verbal participation* during story telling.

Quadrant I stores data where parents and providers disagree with each other and with the current research. Survey data show that both parents and providers survey responses have uncharacteristically low means when asked about the role of direct *reading instruction* when engaging
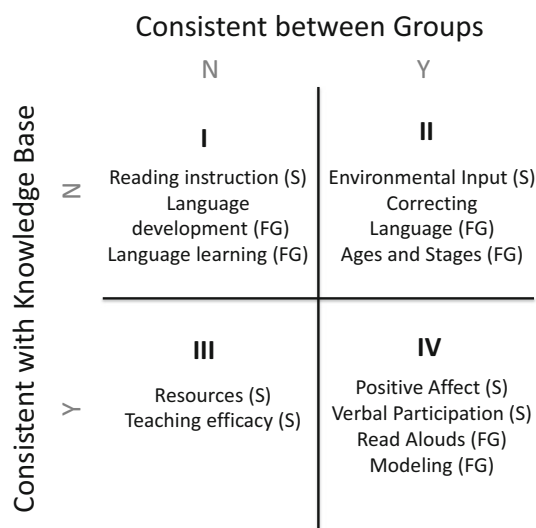

Fig. 2 Highlights from the collaborative choice matrix informed by Abra Park data

with young children, and there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. In focus groups, parents and providers discussed children's *language development* and *language learning* in different ways and to different extents, with providers being more concerned with a standardized trajectory of language development although research states that children can pass through stages of literacy development in a variety of ways at different ages (Teale and Sulzby 1986) and parents relaying the importance of orally labeling individual items to enhance children's vocabulary although research advocates that language learning best happens through authentic conversations as opposed to teaching words in isolation (Dyson and Genishi 2015).

Quadrants II and III of the Collaborative Choice Matrix store data points where some but not full consensus exists. For example, Quadrant II shows that in the case of *correcting language*, both parents and providers engage in this practice and believe that it is important, and yet there is conflicting research regarding this very complicated and multilayered practice. Similarly, Quadrant II illustrates how in the case of *resources*, survey results depict that parents and providers have different access to literacy resources and different ideas of what important resources are necessary to engage children in literate practices. However, both parents and providers have higher means in this area, showing an alignment with research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to form an understanding of where Abra Park childcare providers and parents stand in relation to each other and research regarding the literacy learning of young children. When taking a comprehensive look at the data, we form a better understanding of the microsystems of children's home and childcare settings, and subsequently the mesosystem formed due to the ties children have in both these settings. Taken together, the information ascertained through this investigation creates a portrait of a community invested in children's emergent literacy development and ready to take the next step in community learning. Consistencies between community groups' actions and beliefs illustrate commonalities across contexts and bring to light inconsistencies as possible sites of focus towards developing a more cohesive approach to early literacy development across contexts within the community. Rather than begin a "one size fits all" professional development series, we can now tailor learning opportunities to meet the needs and priorities of one

particular community. This study's results were presented to the APECC and will inform decisions intended to shape the direction of community learning opportunities.

Neighborhood notions of emergent literacy are complex, and similar studies are necessary in any context prior to enacting new support policies and initiatives, as each community holds unique cultural views and needs individualized considerations. In similar studies, it would be interesting to explore the origins of parent beliefs in order to gain more insight into the community. While the specific results of the data collected and analyzed through this survey are not generalizable to the larger population of childcare providers and parents, the utility of this type of investigation warrants some closing remarks.

Conclusion and Implications

Organizing the data through the Collaborative Choice Matrix allows for clear representation for all stakeholders to refer to when making decisions regarding the community's next steps. It is important to note that disagreement or discontinuity with research does not equate a community deficit. No one quadrant can be universally regarded as the "gold standard." The learning experiences of young children vary according to context, and so should the resources designed to support such learning (NAEYC 2009). Within communities, stakeholders should consider whether to move community practice towards consistencies with research and/or consistencies with one another.

This article's findings are not to be interpreted as generalizable; rather, the approaches detailed may be *applicable* to other communities in similar situations; helpful in aiding how other neighborhoods approach community initiatives. Further, the present study contributes to the existing research related to the enactment of research-based emergent literacy practices in settings with non-traditional support structures as well as to the existing research on how childcare providers and parents comparatively view children's emergent literacy development. Targeted attention to each community's individual early childhood contexts and needs will go a long way toward creating the early literacy environments where young children become readers and writers.

Appendix

See Table 2.

Table 2 Survey subset definitions and example items

Scale	Definition of item content	Example of item content
Positive affect (AFF)	Positive affect associated with reading	Parent Item: I enjoy reading with my child
		Provider Item: I enjoy reading with children
Verbal participation (PAR)	The value placed on children's active verbal participation when reading aloud	Parent Item: When we read, I want my child to help me tell the story
		Provider Item: When we read, I want children to help me tell the story
Resources (RES)	Whether limited resources are an obstacle to reading	Parent Item: I don't read to my child because we have nothing to read
		Provider Item: I don't read to children because we have nothing to read
Teaching efficacy (EFF)	Views on the parents' and providers' role as teachers of school-related skills	Parent Item: There is little I can do to help my child get ready to do well in school
		Provider Item: There is little I can do to help children get ready to do well in school
Knowledge base (KNO)	Whether children acquire moral orientation or practical knowledge from books	Parent Item: I try to make the story more real to my child be relating the story to his or her life
		Provider Item: I try to make the story more real to children by relating the story to his or her life
Environment input (ENV)	The malleability of language development	Parent Item: Children inherit their language ability from their parents. It's in their genes
		Provider Item: Children inherit their language ability from their parents. It's in their genes
Reading instruction (INS)	The appropriateness of direct reading instruction	Parent Item: My child is too young to learn about reading
		Provider Item: The children I care for are too young to learn about reading

Survey adapted from DeBaryshe and Binder (1994)

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