

A STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES FACING ARABIC-SPEAKING ESL STUDENTS  
AND TEACHERS: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC AWARENESS

By  
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Teaching and Learning

May 2014

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Joy Egbert, for her unlimited support, guidance, caring, and patience throughout my research process. With her encouragement and valuable comments, I was able to overcome the challenges and the difficulties with comfort and less stress. I would also like to thank Dr. Tom, Dr. Gisela, and Dr. David for their encouraging comments. My thanks are also due to the Arabic-speaking ESL students and their families, the middle school teachers, the pre-service teachers, and the Arab families who kindly participated in my study.

A STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES FACING ARABIC-SPEAKING ESL STUDENTS  
AND TEACHERS: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC AWARENESS

Abstract

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May 2014

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This dissertation includes a pilot study on the challenges facing students and teachers in middle school and a follow-up study on the influences of situated learning on pre-service teachers' cultural and linguistic awareness. The first study was conducted in spring 2012 and it focused on two Arabic-speaking ESL students and eight in-service middle school teachers. Data sources included teacher and student interviews, classroom observations, and a parent survey. Research questions focused on the needs of the Arabic-speaking ESL students, the factors that influence their learning, and the problems the teachers face in supporting these students. The study concluded that several important challenges for teachers and students exist, including time, language support, and knowledge. The follow-up study was conducted in spring 2013 and it focused on 25 pre-service teachers and twelve Arab families. The overall goal of the follow-up study was to explore the influence of situated learning experiences on pre-service teachers' cultural and linguistic awareness. Data sources included a pre- and post-experience case, pre- and post- KWLS chart, focus groups, a family survey, and student reflections. Data showed that the situated learning experience helped the pre-service teachers develop their cultural knowledge as well as learn about Arab families, Arab culture, and their future classrooms.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
STUDY 1: EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES FACING ARABIC-SPEAKING ESL STUDENTS & TEACHERS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL	
ABSTRACT .....	1
1. INTRODUCTION .....	2
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	3
Positive and negative transfer .....	3
Language match .....	4
Home language use .....	5
Authentic texts .....	6
Teacher and student cultural awareness .....	7
Stereotypes .....	8
Research questions .....	11
3. METHODOLOGY .....	12
Description of setting and participants .....	12
Data collection and procedures .....	13
Observation and field notes .....	13
Parent survey .....	14
Teacher and student interviews .....	14

Data analysis .....	15
Limitations .....	16
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....	17
Q1. Do Arabic-speaking ESL students actually face challenges in school?.....	17
Q2. What do teachers perceive to be the needs of their Arabic-speaking ESL students?.....	18
The need for extra time .....	19
The need for cultural awareness .....	21
Q3. What do participants perceive to be the factors that influence the learning of Arabic-speaking ESL students in the classroom?.....	23
Cultural understanding.....	23
Sufficient language support .....	24
Q4. What do teachers perceive to be the problems faced in supporting ESL students in the classroom? .....	26
Teacher education and guidance .....	26
Communication with parents .....	28
5. CONCLUSION .....	31
Implications for research.....	32
Implications for teaching .....	32
REFERENCES .....	33
APPENDIX	
PARENT SURVEY .....	37
STUDY 2: THE INFLUENCE OF SITUATED LEARNING ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC AWARENESS	
ABSTRACT .....	40
1. INTRODUCTION .....	41

2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	45
Situated learning .....	45
Situated learning in international communities .....	47
Situated learning in local communities.....	50
Research questions.....	54
3. METHODOLOGY .....	56
Participants.....	56
Context.....	57
Data source and procedures .....	59
Before the home visit .....	59
After the home visit .....	59
Data analysis .....	61
Credibility and trustworthiness .....	62
Limitations .....	62
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....	64
Q1. How do the pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings change after they are situated in an authentic cultural context?.....	64
Before the experience .....	64
Stereotypes .....	64
Feelings of fear and anxiety .....	65
Lack of classroom solutions.....	67
After the experience .....	68
Feelings of openness and welcome.....	68
Making new assumptions.....	69
Cultural knowledge.....	70



Classroom knowledge .....	72
Q2. How do pre-service teachers and Arab families interact in a semi-structured social situation outside of school? .....	75
Non-stop and informative conversation.....	75
Language barriers.....	76
Similarities and differences.....	77
Q3. How do families react to the experience with the pre-service teachers? .....	79
Feelings of enjoyment.....	79
Bridging cultures.....	80
Sharing culture from families' perspectives .....	80
Q4. How do the pre-service teachers perceive that they can apply this experience to their future classrooms?.....	82
Multicultural classroom environment.....	82
School system and gender.....	83
Cultural integration .....	84
5. CONCLUSIONS .....	87
Implications for teaching .....	89
Implications for research.....	90
REFERENCES .....	91
APPENDIX	
A. KWLS CHART.....	97
B. CLASSROOM SCENARIO .....	98
C. FAMILY SURVEY .....	100

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure 1. Situated learning elements along with activities .....	58
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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the soul of my mother and father who raised me with love and respect and who taught me and supported me in their entire life that encouraged me to be who I am now.

It is also dedicated to my lovely wife, Amal, who shared with me all the difficulties and who gave me love and respect throughout my study in the USA.

It is also dedicated to my lovely cute angels, Shahad and Saja, for their patience to be with me and for their encouragement by giving me love and hugs all the years through.

To the unborn baby who is expected to join my family soon after my graduation.

# Exploring the Challenges Facing Arabic-Speaking ESL Students & Teachers in Middle School

## Abstract

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May 2014

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This study explores the challenges facing Arabic-speaking ESL students as well as teachers in the middle school classroom. Two Arabic-speaking ESL students and eight teachers in a public middle school located in Washington State participated in this exploratory study. Research questions focused on the needs of the Arabic-speaking ESL students, the factors that influence their learning, and the problems the teachers face in supporting these students. Data sources included teacher and student interviews, classroom observations, and a parent survey. Data showed that the students face challenges to learn the English language, the culture, and curricular content using their limited English. The study concluded that several important challenges for teachers and students exist, including time, language support, and knowledge.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The population of ESL students in U.S. schools needs urgent attention because it continues to grow and is expected to exceed 10 million by 2015 (NEA, 2008). Furthermore, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2011), the number of eighth grade English language learners below the basic level in reading achievement is very high (71%) compared to their native counterparts (22%). The same report stated that only 3% of English language learners are at or above the proficient level in reading, compared to 35% of their native counterparts who are at or above this level. This achievement gap for English language learners in U.S. public schools has been almost the same since 1998.

This could mean that teachers are not considering the needs of their students or that there are other challenges students face that are not being effectively addressed. These challenges can be different from one group to another due to cultural and linguistic differences (Al-Khresheh, 2010; Abdo & Breen, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Aubrey, 2009; Barros, 2003; Burt & Peyton, 2003; Miller & Endo, 2004; Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere & Chang, 2007). According to Batalove & McHugh (2010), Arabic was among the top five native languages spoken in 29 states in the 2009-10 school year. Since few research studies have been done on the difficulties that face Arabic-speaking ESL students in U.S. public schools, there is a real need to understand the challenges they face in the classroom. The purpose of this exploratory study is to uncover the challenges facing Arabic-speaking ESL students as well as teachers in the middle school classroom and discover how the students' needs are being met. To do so, this paper first presents what the literature says about Arabic-speaking ESL students as well as teachers, then it discusses the study method and data collection, and finally presents the results according to the research questions. This is followed by conclusions and implications for future research and instruction.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Arabic-speaking ESL students may struggle like other ESL students in U.S public schools. Their struggling can be related to many factors, including cultural and linguistic factors. Teachers' lack of awareness of these factors can also affect Arab students' achievement (Aubrey, 2009; Burt & Peyton, 2003; Miller & Endo, 2004; Palmer et al., 2007). Therefore, it is very important to examine the factors that face this particular group to help them overcome any problems they may encounter in the learning process.

#### **Positive and Negative Transfer**

Palmer et al. (2007) examined the factors that affected a nine-year-old Palestinian ESL student, Abdallah, in acquiring English as a second language. As is the case for many ESL students in U.S. schools, Abdallah was pulled out with other English language learners for two hours each day to receive support in language skills from the ESL teacher. His ESL teacher reported that Abdallah faced difficulties in decoding English words with three or four phonemes and had poor spelling and writing. Abdallah was assessed in both of his languages, which led the researchers to suggest that his Arabic reading skills were not sufficient enough to support him making transfers to his second language, or L2. They also found that Arabic and English share some positive and negative transfers that may ease or hinder the language acquisition of the learner. For example, the alphabetic systems and verb tenses are similar in both languages i.e., positive transfer. However, the researchers noted that many differences can be found between the two languages that lead to negative transfers; for example, English is written from left to right, whereas Arabic is written from right to left. In another study that focused on Jordanian EFL students, Al-Khresheh (2010) examined the interference of Arabic syntactic structures on English syntactic structures. The participants were 115 10th grade EFL students, and the study took place in a Jordanian school. The EFL students were given a

multiple-choice test to determine their errors in simple sentence word order. The findings indicated that Arabic-speaking EFL students have difficulty in the word order used in simple English sentence structure. The study also indicated that Arab students were affected by their use of standard and non-standard Arabic in the transfer process.

Abdo & Breen (2010) also examined the challenges that face English language learners, mainly focusing on the negative transfers that challenged the students. The study included five EFL teachers and six students and took place in one elementary and one secondary school for a three-week period. Similar to the previous study, the researchers found that negative and positive transfers affect the language acquisition of the students. In their study's conclusions, similar to the previous finding, challenges included that Arabic is written opposite of English, from right to left, and that English graphophonemic rules are irregular, whereas these rules in Arabic are not. In order to overcome these challenges, the students may need to practice the second language more frequently; Spolsky (1989) stated that the outcome of the language learning depends in part on the opportunities that learners receive in their language learning. In addition, Egbert et al. (2007) suggested giving students extra time and sufficient feedback to help them develop their language efficiently and effectively.

### **Language Match**

To identify the problems that Arab students face in learning English pronunciation, Barros (2003) examined these problems among a group of Arab students from different Arab countries. There were six participants (five males and one female) involved in the study, and they had each been in the U.S. for at least four years. The results indicated that Arab speakers face difficulties in certain English consonant sounds, such as /p/, /d/, /v/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, and /ŋ/. In a similar investigation that occurred in a different environment, Ahmad (2011) examined Saudi EFL students in regard to the difficulties that face Saudi students in English pronunciation.

The participants were eight students selected randomly from different regions of Saudi Arabia. The participants had never been to any English-speaking countries. The results agreed with those of Barros (2003) that the participants faced difficulty with certain English consonant sounds. Furthermore, Perfetti & Dunlap (2008) pointed out that the match between L1 and L2 is another factor the students may face in second language acquisition. They stated that Arab students may have difficulty with vowels because they rely on context to determine vowels, which is not the case in English. In Arabic sentences, only consonants are written down, and the reader is required to fill in the vowels based on the context. To overcome this challenge, Burt and Peyton (2003) said that ESL students need to be taught the English symbol system and English sound-symbol correspondences because of the different L1 system. For example, Arabic-speaking ESL students may face difficulties with vowels in English because they are not written in Arabic. However, this might be less of a problem if the students have enough time and feedback from instructors and peers (Egbert et al., 2007) because more time and feedback are necessary for students who need extra help and support.

### **Home Language Use**

In the conclusion of their study described above, Palmer et al. (2007) concluded that Arabic should be used at home and school to assist ESL students with their home language skills. They also encouraged further research to look at how the nature of the student's first language affects his or her second language acquisition and what other factors may affect Arab ESL students' performance in the language classroom. In their study discussed earlier, Abdo & Breen (2010) disagreed with Palmer et al. (2007) about using the student's home language to offer support and help. They believed that using the home language in the classroom to explain word meanings is ineffective. They justified their argument by stating that the students need to use English to gain more access to the language. This disagreement, however, can be related to the difference between the two settings: the argument that supports



using the home language occurs in U.S. classrooms, whereas the other occurs in an Arab country where Arabic is probably used most of the time. Meanwhile, Khassawneh (2011) conducted a study that looked at attitudes of Jordanian students towards the use of Arabic in the English classroom. The study included 206 male and female students who were selected based on their class's methods of learning English. The participants were in a class where either Arabic was not allowed, Arabic was used to a large extent, or Arabic was used to some extent. The study found that students with low-level English proficiency were more positive towards the use of the L1 in the English classroom than those with high English proficiency levels. Therefore, it is important to give second language learners some texts in their first language to help them in their second language.

### **Authentic Texts**

Many researchers regard the lack of authentic texts as a problem that faces Arabic-speaking ESL students. For example, based on their case study of an Arabic-speaking ESL student in a U.S. school, Palmer et al. (2007) said that Arabic-speaking ESL students in U.S. public schools need to have texts that are culturally and linguistically related to them. Moreover, they argued that the lack of bilingual texts for Arabic-speaking ESL students prevented the researchers from finding related materials for Abdallah, the participant in their study. They pointed out that such Arabic-English texts can be very useful in the classroom because teachers can use them to engage their students with texts that are culturally and linguistically relevant. Moreover, Melvin & Stout (1987) said that "Authentic texts give students direct access to the culture and help them use the new language authentically themselves, to communicate meaning in meaningful situations rather than for demonstrating knowledge of a grammar point or a lexical item" (p. 44). According to Gilmore (2007), authenticity can be referred to in different situations, such as the text, the participants, and the social or cultural situation. Therefore, using authentic texts can support English language

learners by allowing them to bring their home culture into the classroom. Moreover, in her valuable book that shed lights on different research studies and her own experience with diverse students, Dong (2004) pointed out that bringing the home culture of the ESL students to school is very important and necessary to ensure effective language learning. In addition, authentic texts can also provide learners with “a much richer source of input in the classroom and have the potential to raise learners’ awareness of a wider range of discourse features” (Gilmore, 2011, p. 791). Furthermore, in his study of teacher change in beliefs about the use of linguistic and cultural experiences of ESL students in the science class, Lee (2004) concluded that when teachers integrate science with students’ linguistic and cultural background knowledge, science can be more accessible and meaningful for students. Most importantly, if the students are involved in authentic tasks, their language learning can be developed effectively and efficiently (Egbert et al., 2007).

### **Teacher and Student Cultural Awareness**

The literature indicates that in order to support authenticity in classroom tasks and avoid disengaging Arabic-speaking ESL students from classroom activities, teachers need to know something about Arab culture. Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe (2009) conducted a study to examine educators’ knowledge and perceptions of Arabic and Islamic cultures. The study collected surveys from 131 elementary and middle school teachers and 87 teaching faculty in the U.S. Southwest. The participants were asked to match the terms *Arab*, *Arabic*, *Islam*, and *Muslim* with their definitions, and they were also asked to answer true/false questions about Arabs and some Islamic holidays. The study found that most participants lack basic knowledge about Arab and Islamic culture, including knowledge of Muslim holidays, such as Eid al Fitr. Moreover, most participants mistakenly considered Ramadan to be a Muslim holiday, when in fact, it is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar when Muslims are required to fast during the whole month from dawn to sunset. This knowledge can be useful

for teachers so they can provide safe environments for students during Ramadan and other important days. For example, teachers may avoid scheduling tests during Islamic holidays and enable students to go to the library at lunchtime during Ramadan (Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe, 2009; Ariza, 2006; Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002).

In addition, Brisk (2010) pointed out that culture has an impact on Arabic-speaking ESL students' interactions in the classroom. She gave an example of Sudanese Muslim girls who disengaged from interacting with boys in their groups. This disengagement occurred as a result of their own culture that needs to be understood by teachers in order to help students fully engage in classroom activities. However, giving such opportunities for Arabic-speaking ESL students is not enough without sufficient knowledge of the students' cultural and background knowledge. To demonstrate cultural awareness and support authenticity, Wingfield & Karaman (2001) suggested some actions, such as introducing Arabic language and literature in the classroom to encourage Arab students to participate and interact in the learning process. Moreover, Santos & Suleiman (1993) believed that teachers can support Arabic-speaking ESL students by adjusting their curriculum to include the students' culture and considering their lifestyle. For example, teachers can include the role of Arab scholars during medieval Islamic civilization in different fields, such as medicine (Ibn al-Nafis, Ibn Sina, Al-Razi, and Ibn al-Haytham), geography (Al-Idrisi, Ibn-Batuta, and Ibn-Khaldun), mathematics (Al-Khwārizmī), chemistry (Ibn Hayyān), and other disciplines (Santos & Suleiman, 1993). By including such ideas, Arabic-speaking ESL students can be engaged and involved in the class content. Most importantly, Egbert et al. (2007) suggested that learners should be involved in authentic tasks to ensure efficient and effective language learning.

### **Stereotypes**

In addition to other cultural barriers, stereotyping of Arabs is another barrier that can hinder the learning process of Arab students in U.S. schools. In a study including 500 high

school students that focused on the students' perceptions of Arabs and Middle Easterners, Kamalipour (2000) found out that the participants see the Middle East as: war, terrorism, dangerous, oil, desert, hot, camels, sand, hate, fanatics, radical, oppression, dark skin, dress funny, black veils, cab drivers, oppressed women, always in news. They also see Arabs as: terrorists, Muslims, turbans, veils, hijackers, dark skins, tents, sand, robes, harems, religious, repression, anti-American, Ali Baba, Aladdin, rebels, sandals, Mecca. Moreover, they see Muslims as: strict religion, mosques, Muhammad, long robes, veiled women, always praying, Mecca, holy war, Arabs, violence, terrorism, no women's rights, Allah, Quran, dark skin, harems, sacrifice, militant, war, Middle East, anti-American, strong beliefs. Furthermore, Arab children in U.S. schools are suffering from negative stereotypes about their culture and values that do not represent their actual Arab heritage; this includes, but is not limited to, considering Arabs and Muslims as terrorists (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Wingfield, 2006; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). To avoid misunderstandings, Rivers (1987) stated that the students need to establish cross-cultural interaction through activities. In addition, Egbert et al. (2007) considered having the students attend mindfully to the learning process as an important condition for efficient and effective language learning.

Brisk (1998) argued that it is very useful to understand the factors that affect students negatively in order to help them build on the positive factors instead. Moreover, teachers should be aware of the fact that although the majority of Arabs are Muslims, there are also a small number of non-Muslims (such as Christians and Jews) who speak Arabic and live in an Arab country (Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe, 2009; Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Wingfield, 2006). In addition, there are other minority groups who live in Arab countries who are not Arabs (Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe, 2009). Santos & Suleiman (1993) gave some examples of these groups, such as Kurds, Copts, Armenians, and Berbers. Knowing these differences can help teachers have better communication with both students and their families. However,

ignoring these groups in the classroom may affect their participation in classroom activities, and hence their academic performance can be affected (Brisk, 2010). According to Carrasquillo & Rodríguez (2002), a presentation at the beginning of the school year can be an important strategy in giving sufficient information about Arab and Muslim students to the whole school community. In addition, such awareness can be useful to teachers when it comes to involving Arabic-speaking ESL students in authentic tasks (Egbert et al., 2007).

Based on the literature above, it is clear that a variety of challenges face Arab students as well as teachers. Solutions to these challenges should be explored to support Arabic-speaking ESL students in acquiring the language, culture, and content efficiently and effectively. These challenges can be summarized as linguistic and cultural differences, lack of understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy, lack of motivation, religious and lifestyle differences, lack of cultural awareness, and negative stereotypes. To understand these challenges and their effect on students' learning, a framework proposed by Egbert et al. (2007) can be employed; this framework asserts that effective and efficient language learning can occur if the learning environment meets certain conditions. The current study focuses on three important conditions:

1. Learners are involved in authentic tasks.
2. Learners have enough time and feedback.
3. Learners are guided to attend mindfully to the learning process.

If ESL students are affected by any of the potential language learning barriers, a change in the learning environment to meet the conditions might help. For example, if ESL students' cultures are ignored in the classroom, they may disengage. To avoid such a barrier, teachers might try to understand students' backgrounds and provide them with appropriate and related materials that enable them to be involved in authentic tasks. However, not much is known about the true problems and challenges that face Arabic-speaking ESL students in

U.S. public schools because there are only a few studies that address this particular group. In addition, little has been written about the learning conditions that these Arabic-speaking students find themselves in. To find out more, this study explores Arabic-speaking ESL students in ESL and mainstream classrooms to uncover what may affect their learning both positively and negatively. Three learning conditions provided by Egbert et al. (2007) provided the framework for this study because classrooms that meet these research-based conditions may reduce the challenges for Arabic-speaking ESL students.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the literature review, this study used a qualitative exploratory methodology to investigate the following questions:

1. Do Arabic-speaking ESL students actually face challenges in school?
2. What do teachers perceive to be the needs of their Arabic-speaking ESL students?
3. What do participants perceive to be the factors that influence the learning of Arabic-speaking ESL students in the classroom?
4. What do teachers perceive to be the problems faced in supporting these ESL students in the classroom?

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to help understand the challenges that might affect the classroom learning of Arab students. This section describes the setting, data collection procedures, and data analysis process of the study.

#### **Description of Setting and Participants**

The study took place in a public middle school located in Washington State. Although the majority of the student population is composed of white, middle-class, native English speakers, some students come from different cultures and educational backgrounds, and they speak different languages, including Spanish, Arabic, Hindi, and Chinese. This study focused on two ESL Arabic-speaking students, one each at the 6th and 8th grade levels. Of three native Arabic-speaking students in the school, two students agreed to participate. This small number allowed for rich data collection and a deep investigation of the research questions. To protect the ESL students' identities, the names "Ahmed" and "Ali" were used throughout the discussion instead of their actual names. The students were at the intermediate level of English proficiency based on their English test at school. Being at this level, the participants were a good source to discuss the challenges they faced; they were still considered ESL students, but they had sufficient proficiency in English to participate. Speaking the primary language of the participants was very helpful to me in that I was able to establish a good relationship with the students during data collection and could work with them in their L1 when necessary.

To determine their English level, the participating students were tested upon admittance to the school. Based on the test results, the students were assigned to a specific group level (beginner, intermediate, upper intermediate, or advanced). However, their grade level is not related to their ESL level. The students are assigned to their grade level according

to their educational background and age. Therefore, it is common to see students in the intermediate level of English even though their grade level is different, like the students in this study (6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the intermediate level of ESL). The students are pulled out of their regular classes for 45 minutes every day to take a class taught by the ESL teacher. The school has only one teacher who is certified to teach English as a second language. The ESL students take the rest of their classes with native English-speaking students in their grade. They are labeled as English language learners until they pass the state English proficiency test.

Four teachers participated in the study interviews and classroom observations; these included the History/English teacher, the English/Social Studies teacher, the Earth Science teacher, and the ESL teacher. Four other teachers, from the Algebra, Math, Science/Health, and Healthy Living classes, were only observed because they were either busy or not willing to be interviewed.

#### **Data Collection and Procedures**

This study lasted seven weeks and took place during school hours. To ensure trustworthiness, data were collected using several different sources. The use of different data collection sources enabled the researcher to get a clearer picture of the topic under investigation (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The following is a detailed description of each data source that was used in this study.

**Observation and field notes.** Observations included all activities that the ESL students were involved in during the school day. Observations were recorded according to a checklist for each classroom observation that looked at the three learning conditions (Egbert et al., 2007) and the barriers that these conditions may exacerbate or help overcome. The students were also observed in different settings, such as in the classroom, at lunch, and in the computer room to find out more detail about their daily use of language during school time.



A total of 10 different classes were observed at least twice each. During these observations, in addition to the checklist, I took field notes and noted my own reflections on the students' apparent engagement, activities, reactions, and participation. At the end of each site observation, I organized the notes I had taken into a detailed description.

**Parent survey.** Parents of both students were given survey questions to answer. Using these surveys, data were collected about parents' support of their children, how the children practiced languages at home, parental involvement in the learning process of their children, their daily activities at home, the children's first language problems, any other challenges that might affect the children's language acquisition, and parents' background knowledge.

**Teacher and student interviews.** I chose four of the participants' teachers to interview because they were teaching one of the main subjects (English, ESL, Science, or Social Studies), and they were also very eager to participate and willing to answer any questions I had. All interviews were semi-structured based on the research questions and class observations. The main focus of the interviews was to collect information about the teachers' experiences in supporting ESL students, their beliefs about their methods of teaching ESL students, the challenges they face, the problems that the students face in acquiring the language, and any factors that might affect the students' language learning. The teachers were interviewed individually at the end of the study.

The ESL students were also interviewed individually at school once during the study. Semi-structured interviews were used to ask questions based on class observations and other related issues that I came across during the study. These interviews helped me to determine any challenges students perceived as well as the support they received while they learned both language and content. All interviews were videotaped and audio recorded to decrease

the chance of data loss. All interviews were then transcribed, double checked by a native speaker teacher for consistency, typed, and coded for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was an ongoing process that included reflection, organization, and coding in order to make an appropriate interpretation and have greater understanding of the data (Creswell, 2009). A general inductive approach was adopted in the data analysis process. According to Thomas (2006), this data analysis approach can “condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief summary format,” and it can also establish clear links between the research purpose and its findings based on the raw data (p. 238). Following is a description of the steps taken in the data analysis process: first, the data were organized by transcribing the interviews and writing up field notes with more details. Second, the data were prepared for analysis by reading through to make general sense of what had been collected. Third, the data were coded and questioned in order to highlight the important points related to the main questions of the study. To ensure trustworthiness, these codes were checked by another researcher and recoded when necessary. Fourth, themes were identified through the data coding process. As the themes emerged, I reorganized them and combined them in relevant ways, and then this action was repeated and reviewed several times. Then, six themes were selected as the major themes. I also used a qualitative data analysis computer program (Weft QDA) to manage the themes. Then, I made connections between these themes to make them more organized and to draw a larger picture of these themes. These included different perspectives from participants with some quotations to prepare the discussion. To make connections between the themes and the objective of this study, these major themes were linked to the research questions and the framework of this study through the raw data. These data helped me get a clear understanding of the needs of the Arabic-speaking ESL students,

the factors that influence their learning, and the problems the teachers face in supporting these students.

### **Limitations**

Although this study has limitations that cannot be controlled, its validity is not affected by these limitations. For example, to collect deep and concrete data from participants, I limited the number of participants to only a few, making the study less generalizable. The small number of participants enabled me to collect concrete data that may be difficult to obtain otherwise. Another limitation was that the students were interviewed only once due to their busy class schedules. In addition to this interview, however, this study followed the students in different classrooms and other school activities, which helped the researcher to gather some important data. I also had a chance to sit and talk informally with the students during lunchtime. One more limitation was that my interpretation and my views during the data collection might be affected by my background knowledge as a member of Arab society. Feedback from a colleague helped me to reduce this limitation by looking back to the data several times and making a clear connection between my own interpretation and the data.

## **CHAOTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results and discussion are arranged below based on each research question in order to make it easier to understand the results.

#### **Q1. Do Arabic-Speaking ESL Students Actually Face Challenges in School?**

The literature says that many ESL students are struggling in school, and the results of this study show that the student participants were indeed facing challenges. For example, in one conversation I had with Ahmed to ask him about not working on his task during class, he said that he left his sheet at home because he faced some linguistic difficulties in doing the task (writing a short summary about some astronomers). Instead, Ahmed preferred to do the task at home so he could receive language support from his parents. Moreover, later in my interview with his teacher when I asked about Ahmed's lack of participation in the classroom activity, she said that "is him" and "He will try to get out of the work a lot." She then confirmed that he faced some language difficulties at the beginning of the year; he had told her that when he was not participating in the classroom tasks, it was because he did not understand. At that time, she told him that she could help him individually at the end of the class. Although the teacher gave him some extra support, she stated that in that last few weeks, it seemed like he did not want to try. Ahmed told his teacher that he was still struggling with the language, and he did not participate in some activities. As a result, the teacher was wondering about his classroom participation and how she could guide him again. She also said that she would try to find some ways to guide him and support him to fully participate in classroom tasks. Furthermore, during an algebra test, Ahmed asked his teacher for clarifications and to check his answers more often than other students did. The teacher tried to help him by telling him to look back at his answer when he had something wrong. Then the teacher asked the students to do another task for extra credit. All the students took

that chance except Ahmed. As I was observing the class, he looked at me and said, “I cannot do this.” He added, “I do not know how to do it.” In addition, in the interview, Ahmed told me that when he faced difficulties like in math class, “I do some work and then I do the rest at home so I get help from my parents.” These results show that Ahmed faced challenges in his learning.

Moreover, in an interview with Ali, I asked him about his difficulties in learning English, and he said he faced some difficulties when it came to vocabulary that he could not understand. As a result, he also said it is very hard for him to do a presentation that was worth many points. He preferred to work on homework because he could finish it quickly and get good grades. Additionally, Ali did not like to work with girls, since it was culturally inappropriate; he preferred to work with boys. If he was asked to work with girls, he would stay quiet in the classroom unless the teacher changed his seat.

Furthermore, language support was a big concern for both sets of parents, as they believe that their children need extra support in all classes, particularly social studies and history classes, since they lack background knowledge in these two areas. In the parent survey, both sets of parents agreed that their children face some difficulties at school, and they agreed that their children need extra help in their second language.

The results show that students in this study are challenged in their learning both linguistically and culturally. The following sections will address the support these students receive and the other issues that may affect their learning in the classroom based on the study data.

## **Q2. What Do Teachers Perceive to Be the Needs of Their Arabic-Speaking ESL Students?**

Two central themes arose to answer this question. The need for extra time and cultural awareness are discussed below.

**The need for extra time.** The results show that three out of four teachers perceived the need for extra time repeatedly; this is so teachers can give students extra support and additional explanations. In an interview with the History/English teacher, he referred to time as a main challenge for all teachers. This argument was also supported by the ESL teacher, as she stated that the ESL students “should have extra time with their work, they should have more explanation.” This teacher also insisted on the importance of time so the students can practice their second language with sufficient support from their teachers. She said, “Give students time to process because it takes processing time to translate in your head from one language to another.”

The results indicated that, in part, teachers cannot give their students the time and support they need because they have a large number of students in the classroom. The History/English teacher said “I have ninety-five kids and there's not enough time to introduce a new topic to thirty-two kids, it is just a smaller class that I have in the middle, but I have thirty-two and other classes and just say give everybody an individual education is just I don't think it's quite possible.” However, teachers try to do the best they can under these difficult circumstances. For example, the English/Social studies teacher helps the students individually with more explanations when needed. Moreover, the History/English teacher uses some strategies, such as pairing the ESL students with others who can give them some extra help beside the teacher's support when necessary.

In an interview with Ahmed, he said he likes his ESL class because it is the easiest class for him, and he can finish his class tasks on time before the period ends. One reason for this could be that the number of students in the ESL classroom is very small, so they have more opportunity to be helped by the ESL teacher, whereas the case is different in other mainstream classrooms. Despite the 45 minutes that the ESL students receive on a daily basis with the ESL teacher, they also need help from others. Based on classroom observations, the

students face some difficulty in other classes to finish their tasks during class time. For example, in the Science/Health classroom observation, Ali was working on his task with some help from the teacher. Then the teacher announced that it was time to check the students' work. Ali was the first to be evaluated. The teacher's comment was that Ali finished part of the task, but some work still needed to be done, such as adding some definitions. In addition, during observations, both Ahmed and Ali sought more support and time to finish their tasks. For example, Ahmed asked the teacher for more clarifications about language meaning and content than anyone else in the class during the algebra test that was given at the beginning of the class. In addition, he took a longer time to hand back his paper; other students were already working on other tasks by the time he finished. The ESL students cannot receive the same support in the mainstream classes as they do in the ESL class because the teachers say they need to focus on other issues that are important for their own classrooms rather than focusing on the ESL students' linguistic needs. For example, the History/English teacher stated that, "In the regular English classes, some teachers focus more on the big pictures, some people focus more on the nuts and bolts grammatical stuff, we don't spend a whole lot of time on the grammatical issues."

According to Egbert et al. (2007), sufficient time is important. They suggest that sufficient time and feedback is a necessary condition in the classroom. However, teachers may not have time because of the number of students they have and their limited time in general. Therefore, it might be useful if other stakeholders, such as parents, cooperated with teachers so they can give their children extra time to finish their tasks at home. Palmer et al. (2007) believe that home support is necessary and important to assist ESL students. Thus, this argument highlights the importance of establishing good communication between teachers and parents of ESL students, discussed later in this paper.

**The need for cultural awareness.** According to the data, the teachers perceived that knowing about Arabic culture can help them to support the learning of the Arabic-speaking ESL students in the classroom. Although the teachers noted that they need more help to be culturally aware of their students' needs, they do a lot of work to find out more about their students and help them based on their cultural needs. For example, with her little experience with diverse students, the English/Social Studies teacher tries to do the best she can to help her Arabic-speaking ESL students. She explained the way she encourages her students to share their own culture with the rest of the class. She referred to an example of Ali as he leaves every Friday for prayer; the other students were curious to know why he leaves on Friday. To encourage sharing and to avoid misleading, the teacher asked Ali to tell the class about his Friday, and he shared his experience with them. Another example that acknowledges the teachers' awareness of their students to support them in their school life was stated by the ESL teacher. She said that, "Being aware and the school district's aware also they mention on our menu no pork for students; they can't eat pork and they have alternative foods." An additional example was that the ESL teacher watches her Arabic-speaking ESL students during Ramadan, the month where Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. She said, "When Ramadan occurs I tried to be aware of it in my classroom, but I also mention it to the office that Ramadan is occurring and we shouldn't have kids running on the playground when they can't drink water or eat food until tonight, at sundown, and then they put out the word to PE teachers." Although such awareness can help students in some ways, such as providing safe environments for students during Ramadan (Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe, 2009; Ariza, 2006; Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002), there are other cultural issues explained below that need more attention.

According to Egbert et al. (2007), giving students authentic tasks can be a good option, as they can use their background knowledge, and this may give them an opportunity



to interact and negotiate with others. Some teachers in this study enabled their students to share their culture with others, but it was mostly limited to certain topics and in certain classes. As it is important to share topics that are related to particular events, it is also important for Arabic-speaking ESL students to share their own important events, such as Ramadan, Eid al Fitr, and Eid al Adha. One of the parents disagreed that teachers support his child's culture and religion; his concern was about sharing the important days for Arab families. By giving them an opportunity to talk or write about such events, teachers can encourage the students to use their own background knowledge and facilitate better performance (Palmer et al., 2007; Santos & Suleiman, 1993; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). It is also important to mention that such examples from Islam can work for all Muslims, who may speak different languages, but not for Arabic students who are not Muslim. Therefore, it is also important for teachers to be familiar with such differences (Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe, 2009; Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Wingfield, 2006). Thus, the opportunity to enable the students to share their own culture with other class members is important (Brisk, 2010). As noted previously, Egbert et al. (2007) consider involving learners in authentic tasks, such as those involving their lives outside of school, as one of the three important learning conditions.

In short, the data show that the need for extra time and cultural awareness are two important themes for teachers in this study in order to support their Arabic-speaking ESL students in the classroom. Based on the findings in relation to the second research question, teachers need to be aware of their students' needs in order to help them accordingly. In addition, learning conditions should be taken into account; these include involving learners in authentic tasks, giving them opportunities to interact, and giving them sufficient time and feedback.

### **Q3. What Do Participants Perceive to Be the Factors That Influence the Learning of Arabic-Speaking ESL Students in the Classroom?**

Two central themes arose from the data to answer this question. Two influences, cultural understanding and language support, are discussed below.

**Cultural understanding.** One major theme that participants perceived as influencing the learning of the Arabic-speaking ESL students is a lack of cultural understanding. This lack of understanding can be related to teachers, students, and families. For example, some teachers said that they were reluctant to talk about religion with students to avoid misunderstanding. In his interview, the History/English teacher said that, “A lot of times the issue of Islam comes up and I think I feel very strongly that I have to kind of bend over backwards to make sure that I'm not projecting Islam as a problem religion.” This concern about students’ differences like religion can be a challenge to teachers who lack sufficient knowledge about their students. Moreover, in another interview, the English/Social Studies teacher said that “I never know if I should ask about faith kind of questions. I don't know how open someone is to sharing that.”

This lack of understanding can also occur when students avoid talking about their own religion and culture in the classroom. For example, Ahmed did not discuss his culture and religious beliefs in the classroom because, as he explained, “It is actually not allowed to talk about religion stuff in school.” The student was not really happy to discuss this topic; follow-up questions put to him to find out more about this claim resulted in only short answers; each time, he referred to the law and the school regulations. He also said that, “It is in the law, well you can talk, but it is not preferred.” Ahmed did not understand exactly what role religion could play in school. Egbert et al. (2007) argue that teachers need to help their students to attend mindfully to the learning process. In another interview with the Earth Science teacher about her experiences with Arabic-speaking ESL students, she commented

that she failed to connect the classroom topic (how earth resources affect different cultures) with the student's culture (from Saudi Arabia), as he preferred not to talk about life in Saudi Arabia in the classroom. The teacher was confused, and she could not figure out the reason for not sharing his home culture in the classroom. The teacher also said that she wondered whether the student had any positive experiences, as he did not want to share about life in Saudi Arabia. However, the teacher believed that it was not a language barrier because the student understood what she was asking, and she said that it "may be a culture thing, he didn't think it was appropriate." As I asked her about her following up with the student to find out the reason of not sharing his culture in the classroom, she said that the student told her he did not like to share because she is a woman. Therefore, it is important to learn about the possible factors that influence the students in the classroom, one of which is cultural differences.

According to Aubrey (2009), lack of understanding of cultural differences such as religion can affect students in the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary and important to understand these differences in order to provide support to the students who speak another language that is completely different from their teachers' and who come from another culture (Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe, 2009; Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Brisk, 1998; Brisk, 2010; Wingfield, 2006). Whether due to culture or language, the students face difficulties in their learning process. This can be due to lack of understanding of both teachers and students.

**Sufficient language support.** Another major factor that the teachers perceived as influencing the learning of their Arab students is language support. The teachers perceived that the Arabic-speaking ESL students face some difficulties in acquiring and using vocabulary but did not or could not offer the language support needed. The ESL teacher has more opportunities to support her students when they face difficulties in their language classes, whereas this is not the case in other mainstream classes because, as she said, "they assume all kids should know this vocabulary." The data provide other examples where

language support, or lack thereof, might have influenced the students' learning. For example, in one of the Healthy Living classroom observations, Ahmed was moving around as part of the class activity while he looked at the kitchen objects and wrote down some notes about the position of each item. As I reached him, he asked me in quiet Arabic about the name of the stove. He smiled at me as a thank you and then immediately wrote the new word down on his sheet. Then he moved around looking for something else; he opened a drawer and looked carefully at the items. After that, he looked at an electric device and again asked me in Arabic for its name. He smiled and wrote the word down on his sheet with some spelling mistakes. Although the student was working hard on his task, he faced some vocabulary issues that other students in the class did not. Without sufficient support in the classroom, he struggled to finish his task.

Ahmed also talked about the difficulties that he faced when communicating with teachers. He said that, "I just talk repeating the question and sometimes once use a substitute and teacher can't understand me, he asks me what I said like thousand times so another one of the students tell him what I meant." Although Ahmed speaks the second language, he still needs further support before he can use the language appropriately and be understood by others. Lack of vocabulary and differences between the two languages (negative transfer), as noted in the literature, can be some reasons for the miscommunications.

Language support was also a big concern for parents, as both sets agreed that their children need extra help in their second language; they referred to language as one of the difficulties that their children are facing. The Earth Science teacher also agreed that students need language support and said that she tries to provide it in different ways. She explained that she was trying to give her students the help they needed to make things easier for them, but she still needs to do a lot of work before she can help them learn effectively and sufficiently. For example, she stated that "How fast I talk is a big thing for the three of them

(the Arabic-speaking ESL students) and so I try to slow down.” She also gives them copies of notes when they need extra help. This teacher asked Ahmed about his difficulties, and he responded, “I understand your words, but I don't know how to answer.” The teacher then added that “he is able as he put it to translate it word for word and know what each of the words means, but then to formulate an answer he said he struggles with.” This means that the student needs language support before he can use the language appropriately.

According to the data, lack of understanding and language support can be a struggle for both teachers and students alike. The students need a lot of language support, and the teachers need to find out how to give them sufficient support under the difficult conditions they have in school, such as too little time and other issues mentioned earlier. According to the literature, language support is very important; as Spolsky (1989) states, students need frequent opportunities to practice the language. Therefore, it is very important to consider learning styles and motivation to enable students to attend mindfully to the learning process (Egbert et al., 2007). In addition, lack of understanding can also hinder teachers from giving their Arabic-speaking ESL students authentic tasks (Egbert et al., 2007). In addition to these factors, teachers also face some other challenges in supporting their Arabic-speaking ESL students. These difficulties will be discussed in relation to the following research question.

#### **Q4. What Do Teachers Perceive to Be the Problems Faced in Supporting These ESL Students in the Classroom?**

Two central themes arose to answer this question. Teacher education and guidance as well as communication with parents are discussed below.

**Teacher education and guidance.** The first theme that addresses this question is the need for teacher learning opportunities. According to the data, the teachers perceived that one problem that challenges them is the lack of professional development focusing on the cultural and linguistic differences of Arab students. Three out of four teachers expressly and

repeatedly talked about the need for more training about their students' cultures to support them in their language development. For example, the History/English teacher said, "I don't think we have a huge amount of training other than the fact of what we know and what we don't know." He added, "I think you learn about your individual students by talking with them and by expressing concern and when they share something following it up, but you know we're not taught anything about Arabic culture other than what we learn I think." In addition, during the interviews, three out of four teachers in this study professed to know just basic details about their Arabic-speaking ESL students' cultures and backgrounds. For example, the History/English teacher knew some details about some of his ESL students in general, but not specifics; he mentioned that "I don't know much about Arabic students. I know some religious details, I know some history details, but not much, particularly about what's important to Arabic people." Adding to that, the Earth Science teacher clearly stated her lack of experience with Arabic-speaking ESL students' cultures and background knowledge as she stated that "I am so unfamiliar with actually the Arabic culture or what is in their background." The Earth Science teacher clarified the necessity of getting to know more details about her students. She explicitly asked for guidance as well as credible and reliable information to help teachers understand their particular students' needs. Although the English/Social Studies teacher did not talk about teacher education, she mentioned that she learned about Arabic cultures from her previous history classes, from an Arab friend, and from her Arab students; she added that she always needs to keep learning.

According to the literature, integrating students' backgrounds into classroom activities is very important and necessary to support English language learners (Brisk, 2010; Dong, 2004; Gilmore, 2007; Gilmore, 2011; Lee, 2004; Melvin & Stout, 1987; Palmer et al., 2007). Teachers in this study need appropriate knowledge to support their Arabic-speaking ESL students; a lack of knowledge may prevent teachers from giving students authentic tasks

to encourage them to participate in classroom activities (Egbert et al., 2007). Having said that, teachers in the study claimed to be doing the best they can to support their students. However, such support can be difficult when teachers lack adequate understanding of their students. The teachers in this study stated that they perceive a real need for further education and guidance focusing on Arabic-speaking ESL students in order to support them in their language and content learning.

**Communication with parents.** Another issue that the teachers see as a challenge is the lack of communication with parents. According to the data, the teachers perceived that they were not able to communicate effectively and efficiently with parents in order to support the ESL students culturally, socially, and academically. As the ESL teacher stated, even though most of the time one of the parents of the ESL students speaks English, there are other challenges that may widen the gap between teachers and parents. For example, in an interview with the History/English teacher about meeting with Arabic-speaking ESL students' parents, he said, "I feel bad that I haven't met Ahmed's parents." Instead, he only emails them when necessary. The teacher adds that if the parents don't have a problem, and they don't come to see him or don't email him, he usually doesn't talk to them. This problem of communication with parents can be partly attributed to language, as the ESL teacher and the English/Social Studies teachers said. Moreover, the English/Social Studies teacher believes that communication with parents is very important, and she therefore felt that there was a real need to establish good communication with them. The teacher said that "I have had students from all over the world and again not really any problems communicating with them, but sometimes with parents it is a little difficult and that's always been a concern to me." In addition, both sets of parents disagree that teachers contact them regularly to ensure sufficient support to their children. In general, the mainstream teachers in this study do not participate in regular communication with the parents of the ESL students. The ESL teacher

said that “If a parent has trouble with English, everybody should know to slow down their speaking, just slow down, clarify words as you go along and try to understand what the parent is saying or asking, and we have people in offices and teachers who don't understand that.”

Furthermore, when teachers were asked about their preferred communication method with parents, most of them preferred to have face-to-face communication because they could understand better with facial expressions; they suggested that communication would not be possible otherwise. The Earth Science teacher said, “I have tried [to communicate with parents] over the telephone I think is the worst one because some of them with their accent you can't understand and on the telephone you can't even see a facial expression.” The teachers prefer face-to-face interaction because it helps them get the message clearly, whereas understanding can be difficult to achieve when using other methods. In fact, some of the teachers, like the Earth Science teacher, totally disagree with using email as a method of communication with parents because, as she said, “I have struggled with some of the parents' sentence structure, just the way they type, the way they word their stuff, you're reading it, and you don't really know what they're trying to ask.”

According to the literature, working with parents can be an important issue in supporting ESL students, so teachers need to consider communication and cooperation with parents to ensure adequate support for the students (Brisk, 1998; Brisk, 2010; Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002; Dong, 2004; Santos & Suleiman, 1993). One idea can be inviting families to participate in classroom activities (Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002). The literature notes that parents can be a good source of information about their culture. Thus, teachers can use this knowledge to provide authentic tasks for these students (Egbert et al., 2007) in order to help them achieve efficient language and content learning.



To sum up, the need for education and guidance as well as communication difficulties are among the problems that teachers perceived that they face in the classroom. Teacher education can provide teachers with appropriate ways to support their struggling students. For example, by being aware of the students' needs, teachers can provide them with authentic tasks to increase their participation in the classroom (Egbert et al., 2007). In addition, parents can also be a good source of knowledge about their students so teachers can benefit from such opportunities, as indicated in the literature.

## **CHAOTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the study results, six challenges (time, cultural awareness, cultural understanding, language support, teacher education/guidance, and parent communication) were highlighted in relation to the literature, the participants' perceptions, and the three learning conditions. For example, lack of time can be a challenge to students if they have difficult tasks, if teachers speak/write quickly, or if they lack sufficient support. Thus, teachers and students may need to negotiate their activities so that students have appropriate time and teachers have time to provide feedback. In addition, teachers and students can pay attention to cultural awareness because gaining awareness can help teachers give their students authentic tasks and hence support them based on their background, and it can also help students participate more easily. If teachers become more aware of their students' cultures and students are given a chance to share their own culture and knowledge with parent support, students may make learning gains more effectively. Furthermore, teacher education is important because when teachers lack knowledge about their students' culture and language, they can face challenges in supporting their students. It is clear from the study results that challenges can face both students and teachers. Teachers need support because they are struggling to find appropriate ways to help their students. Each teacher is trying to do the best he or she can; however, without sufficient help and support from everyone involved in the learning process, it can be difficult to teach effectively. Parents, students, teachers, and school administrators can be part of the learning process and play a role in overcoming these challenges.

## **Implications For Research**

Due to the limited time of this study and the lack of studies that focus on Arabic-speaking ESL students in U.S. public schools, there are a number of important issues that need to be taken into account for future studies. First, it is important to find out whether larger or more diverse populations can lead to the same results. For example, this study focused on two Arabic-speaking students from two Arab regions, but other studies may include different regions with larger populations. This study also focused on two male students; future studies could include females or both genders to explore whether females have different views and challenges than males. Another study could look at perceptions of pre-service teachers who receive education about Arabic-speaking ESL students. A study like this could provide evidence as to whether teacher education can help teachers to better work with Arabic-speaking ESL students. Third, the current study focused on middle school students, but future studies could include other levels of learners. For example, research with students in high schools with different experiences could add more to these findings.

## **Implications For Teaching**

Families are very important in the learning process to help their children get a better education. Based on the findings of this study, it seems that there was not much communication between families and the mainstream teachers. This lack of communication needs to be taken into account, and some ways to establish good relationships with these families needs to be found. The literature indicates that language and/or culture can be barriers that may prevent these families from coming to school and participating in school activities. However, it is also clear that inviting families to share their language and culture in a particular activity in the classroom may encourage them to participate. Overall, communicating with families may help teachers to provide support to Arabic-speaking ESL students.

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# APPENDIX

## Parent Survey

- 1) How many children live with you?
- 2) What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
  - a) High School
  - b) College
  - c) Master degree
  - d) Other: -----

- 3) What is your child's level in his first language? Check (✓) where appropriate:

No.	Skill	Excellent	Very good	Good	Poor	Very Poor
a)	Speaking					
b)	Writing					
c)	Reading					

- 4) What language(s) does your child mostly use at home to communicate with parents?
  - a) Arabic
  - b) English
  - c) Both
  - d) Other, please specify:-----
- 5) What language(s) does your child mostly use at home to communicate with siblings?
  - a) Arabic
  - b) English
  - c) Both
  - d) Other, please specify:-----
- 6) How frequently do you assist your child with his homework?
  - a) Always
  - b) Very Often
  - c) Sometimes
  - d) Rarely
  - e) Never

- 7) How do you support your child's first language?

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-----

- 8) What are the difficulties that face your child at school?

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-----

- 9) To what extent do you agree to the following:

A. My child needs extra help in his first language.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

B. My child needs extra help in his second language.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree



- d) Strongly disagree
- C. Teachers at middle school support my child's cultural and background knowledge.
  - a) Strongly agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Disagree
  - d) Strongly disagree
- D. Teachers are aware of my child's needs.
  - a) Strongly agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Disagree
  - d) Strongly disagree
- E. Teachers contact me regularly to ensure that my child has the support s/he needs at home and at school.
  - a) Strongly agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Disagree
  - d) Strongly disagree
- F. My child's religion is highly respected in school.
  - a) Strongly agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Disagree
  - d) Strongly disagree
- 10) What concerns do you have about American culture that could affect your child's culture?  
 -----  
 -----
- 11) What are the things that you do not like your child to learn from school?  
 -----  
 -----
- 12) Does your child use a computer/the Internet at home?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 13) If yes, what are the most common purposes of using a computer/the Internet at home?  
 -----  
 -----
- 14) Do you think the computer helps your child to develop his language?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 15) If your answer to the previous question was yes, tell how:  
 -----  
 -----
- 16) In what language do you receive information from school?
  - a) English
  - b) Arabic
  - c) Both

d) Other: -----

17) In what language do you prefer to get information from school?

e) English

f) Arabic

g) Both

h) Other: -----

18) How often do you attend school activities?

a) Weekly

b) About once a month

c) About twice a year

d) Never

19) What are the important holidays in your culture that you want your child to celebrate at home or elsewhere rather than being in school? Please start with the most important.

a) -----

b) -----

c) -----

d) -----

e) -----

20) Does your child's teacher respect these holidays and share them with the class as part of your child's culture/religion?

a) Yes

b) No

If your answer was yes, give some examples from classroom.

-----  
-----

If your answer was no, do you think teachers should be aware of these holidays as important days in your child's culture/religion?

a) Yes

b) No

“FROZEN UP LIKE AN ICE CUBE!”:  
THE INFLUENCE OF SITUATED LEARNING ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS'  
CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC AWARENESS

Abstract

by Omran Akasha, Ph.D.  
Washington State University  
May 2014

Chair: Joy Egbert

This study shows that while pre-service teachers might have some misunderstandings or lack of knowledge about ESL students' families, cultures, and languages, their perceptions and understandings may change as their learning is situated in new cultural spaces. The overall goal of this study was to explore the influence of situated learning experiences on pre-service teachers' cultural and linguistic awareness. This study investigated in part the interaction between culturally diverse families and pre-service teachers. It also explored changes in pre-service teachers' attitudes and knowledge, their perceived applications of the situated experience to their future teaching, and the families' reactions to this experience. Data were collected throughout one semester using different data sources including a pre- and post-experience case, pre- and post- KWLS chart, focus groups, a family survey, and student reflections. Data showed that the situated learning experience helped the pre-service teachers develop their cultural knowledge as well as learn about Arab families, Arab culture, and their future classrooms. The study concluded that the experience helped the pre-service teachers gain new knowledge, positive attitudes, and some ideas for their future diverse classrooms.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Being the father of a 6-year-old daughter from a Muslim Arab society and living in the U.S. can be a big challenge due to the potential difficulties that she could face in school. Shahad started first grade full of energy, the same as most other kids, but I was worried that this energy might decrease if she struggled with some challenges, particularly when she was new to the school community. Fortunately, I visited her in the first week of school during lunchtime and I found Shahad holding her teacher's hand, trying to explain that she could not eat the meat in the cafeteria and asking for an alternative. As I talked to her, she calmed down and then she told me in quiet Arabic that she couldn't eat lunch at school because they served meat that was not halal (prepared according to Muslim law). After I had a short conversation with her, she understood that she could order a sandwich instead of the meat-based hot lunch. Finally, with my support, she ordered a peanut butter sandwich and the problem was solved.

In fact, other students may not be as lucky as Shahad; one Arab child in the same class as Shahad mistakenly ate pork (forbidden by her religion) during lunch at school. As a result, her whole family felt sad and frustrated. Indeed, from an Islamic religious point of view, eating pork is considered a sin. Because the child ate it without knowing, it was not a sin, of course, but it was still difficult for the family to accept.

As a father with some knowledge about the issues that my daughter might face in school, I was able to help Shahad start her school comfortably. However, this is not true for all parents, many of whom may lack the appropriate knowledge to support their children in school. Educating teachers about cultural and linguistic differences is very important because parents, and their culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children, often speak different languages and have different cultural practices from their teachers. These differences may

cause some difficulties that can hinder CLD students' achievement in school (Miller & Endo, 2004).

Teachers need to be able to work with and support CLD children, and their preparation to do so should start in their teacher education program. It is necessary to engage pre-service teachers with different cultures during their programs in order to prepare them to teach students that come from diverse language and culture backgrounds. It is important because the number of ELL students is growing and is expected to exceed 10 million in U.S. schools by 2015 (NEA, 2008), and these students are not succeeding. In fact, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2011) reported that the number of eighth grade English language learners (ELLs) below the basic level in reading achievement is very high (71%) compared to their native counterparts (22%). In addition, Terrazas, (2011) reported that Arabic-speaking ELLs (ages 5 and up) make up about 40 percent of the 2 million Arabs in the U.S. In spite of changing classroom demographics, many teachers lack sufficient training to support their ELLs based on the students' needs (Brisk, 2010; Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002; Gay, 2002; Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclerc, & Chang, 2007; Santos & Suleiman, 1993; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). Indeed, like other ELL groups, Arabic-speaking ELLs face some consistent difficulties in their learning in American public schools. This may be because, according to Aburumuh, Smith & Ratcliffe's (2009) study, teachers lack basic knowledge about Arab and Islamic culture, including knowledge of Muslim holidays. In addition, stereotyping of Arabs is very common in America due to misunderstandings of Arabs and Arab cultures (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Kamalipour, 2000; Wingfield, 2006) and because Arab culture has been misrepresented by the media for decades (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Wingfield, 2006; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001).

In support of the idea that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of Arabs, Akasha (2013) found that many middle school teachers (both mainstream and ESL) lack the

appropriate knowledge to understand their Arabic-speaking ELL students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers in the study had never learned about Arab culture except from media sources. This lack of knowledge prevented teachers from fully supporting their students based on their needs, whether culturally, socially or linguistically. The study also found that, among other issues, most participating teachers, as a result of their limited knowledge, were reluctant to talk about students' cultures in the classroom in order to avoid any misunderstandings. However, a number of researchers have considered that knowledge of students' cultures is important for effective language teaching (Brisk, 2010; Egbert, Hanson-Smith & Chao, 2007; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001; Santos & Suleiman, 1993). To help educate teachers about Arab culture and language, research suggests that situated learning experiences can be used.

According to the literature on situated learning, there is evidence that situated learning may help teacher-learners to learn while they interact with others in authentic contexts (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schell & Black, 1997). However, lack of research that examines the influence of teacher learning situated in Arab culture on teachers' beliefs creates a gap in the literature that needs further investigation. Thus, this study examines the influence of learning experiences situated in Arab cultural spaces on pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings of their future Arab students. What is unique in this current study is that it is the first study that situates pre-service teachers with Arab families, from whom their culture and language are perceived as quite different (Abdo & Breen, 2010; Al-Khresheh, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Aubrey, 2009; Barros, 2003; Burt & Peyton, 2003; Miller & Endo, 2004; Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclerc & Chang, 2007).

To examine the influence of learning experiences situated in Arab culture on pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings of Arab culture and language, this current study first presents what the literature says about situated learning and pre-service teachers'

cultural experiences in international and local settings, followed by the research questions. It then discusses the study methodology and data collection and presents the findings according to the research questions. This is followed by conclusions and implications for future research and instruction.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to develop a framework for teacher-learning about CLD students-- particularly Arab students-- the literature on situated learning is explored in this section.

#### **Situated Learning**

According to the literature, learning can be meaningful if it is embedded in the social and physical context within which it will be used (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989), which can provide an authentic context that reflects the way the knowledge will be used in real life (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). This does not mean that teachers can only learn about teaching at school; rather, teachers can learn from the activity they are engaged in at the time of learning (Borko, 2004). This situated view of learning is supported by a number of scholars. For example, Lave (1988) argues that learning in natural settings occurs as a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it is situated. Thus this kind of learning can provide authentic activities (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). More important, these activities are an initial part of the learning process (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Furthermore, according to situated learning theory, learning is situated when people interact in a socially and culturally structured environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In addition, situated learning provides access to expert (someone who is knowledgeable in a particular area) performance (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Gay (2002) supports this view, noting that academic knowledge and skills situated within lived experiences are more easily and thoroughly learned. Thus, situated learning theory encourages learners to learn in an environment with social interaction where multiple roles and perspectives are integrated (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Further, Choi and Hannafin (1995) define situated learning as an authentic environment that enables participants to learn from the situation they are exploring, as well as from reflection and articulation (in Herrington & Oliver, 2000).



A number of studies show situated learning to be effective for developing knowledge through practice in authentic settings. For example, White (2006) examined the effect of a classroom-situated learning activity (authentic setting) on student-teachers' teaching knowledge. White looked at the perceptions of 10 student-teachers in their last year of training in New Zealand. These students were required to teach in a local school for 12 full days. Different situated learning elements were examined to evaluate the student-teachers as they practiced in an authentic classroom. These elements are: authentic context, engagement, opportunities to learn new strategies, transfer of knowledge, and community of practice. In order to develop their knowledge, the student-teachers were engaged in teaching experiences in an actual classroom where they had to solve problems and engage with different classroom activities. They were also given an opportunity to learn some skills by observing teachers and then applying their own knowledge, with help from other teachers when necessary. The student-teachers were expected to take control of the entire classroom with feedback and support from the observing lecturer, who visited each classroom twice during the study period. Data were collected by observing the student-teachers in the classroom, interviewing them about their teaching experiences, and taking field notes. The study found that this authentic experience gives them an opportunity to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills the student-teachers needed to be qualified teachers. The study also found that opportunities to receive feedback and to reflect were very important aspects of their experience while they taught in an authentic classroom. Overall, the study found that all student-teachers successfully developed aspects of their teaching through participating in an authentic (situated) classroom experience.

In the above literature, a number of elements were found to be important to situated learning. These elements, such as authentic context, authentic activities, social interaction, access to experts, and reflection, should be taken into account when situated learning is

applied and evaluated (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Choi & Hannafin, 1995; Herrington & Oliver, 2000; White, 2006). In the following section, some studies that examined learning that occurred in international and local communities are described in order to highlight these important elements of situated learning.

### **Situated Learning in International Communities**

Research has found that situated learning can support the development of cultural awareness of pre-service teachers (Dedeoglu & Lamme, 2011; Smith, 2009). One way to situate learning is to send teachers to other cultures, as many study abroad programs do (see, for example, Hopkins-Gillispie, 2012; Lee, 2011; Marx & Moss, 2011; Sharma, Aglazor, Malewski, & Phillion, 2011). Although these studies occurred in different settings and included different participants, they all found that cross-cultural experiences abroad could support the cultural understanding of pre-service teachers.

For example, Marx and Moss (2011) conducted a case study to deeply explore the influence of an international cross-cultural experience on one pre-service teacher. The project being explored was created to enhance the cultural awareness of teacher education students and prepare them to teach diverse groups in public schools in the USA. After completing teaching experiences in domestic schools in the U.S, the pre-service teachers in the program were then required to complete one semester in London in a local school with many immigrant students. The study's focus teacher, Ana, worked full time with secondary students. She also took two courses led by a British teacher. These two environments enabled her to live and work in two situations different from her own. In-depth interviews, participant observation, student coursework, student journals, and informal interviews indicated that the participant was influenced by her experience abroad, resulting in intercultural development. Although this program successfully benefited the participant in her cultural development, Marx and Moss mention that it is difficult to design a cross-cultural experience abroad where

the language is similar because participants may be discouraged if they feel cultural dissonance in this environment. According to the researchers, such international experiences can address pre-service teachers' intercultural needs in ways that can be difficult otherwise. They highlight the importance of including coursework and opportunities for feedback and reflection in any cultural experience program.

In a similar study, Lee (2011) examined the benefits of international experiences on 15 Hong Kong student teachers. The participants joined a six-week international experience in New Zealand. In this experience, the student teachers were required to stay with New Zealand host families while abroad, take language classes and strategy workshops, and participate in field experiences and community activities. In addition, the student teachers were placed in local schools for teaching practice. Interviews, field reflections, and program evaluations found that the international experience helped the participants to learn about different education systems, new teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, different learning environments and different cultures. This study concluded that giving participants an opportunity to practice the English language in an English speaking country, as well as develop cultural awareness while integrating into another culture, helped them to develop new teaching skills and knowledge that would not be possible in their own hometowns. According to the findings, Lee argues that such experience should be included in teacher education programs, even for a short time, to enhance teachers' awareness and enable them to work confidently in teaching different ethnic groups. Thus, this finding supports other studies that highlighted important elements of situated learning such as authentic context and activities, and opportunities for feedback and reflection.

Hopkins-Gillispie (2012) agrees that enabling pre-service teachers to be aware of other cultures is necessary and important. Hopkins-Gillispie conducted a study to examine the benefits that U.S. pre-service teachers could gain from a two-week cross-cultural

experience in a Latin American classroom. This study was part of a university course that offered pre-service teachers experiences participating in a multi-language school. The study included 12 pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers were required to participate in classroom activities as teachers and/or assistants as well as participate in community and family activities out of school. To examine the participants' perceptions of this experience, different data sources were used such as journals, classroom notes, pre and post semi-structured interviews, a collaborative research project, classroom observation, and focus groups with teachers, administrators and staff. Being in a different classroom environment and engaging with the experts in different activities, the pre-service teachers benefited from working in classrooms, evaluations, lesson plans, observing multicultural concerns in relation to education, developing teaching skills with attention to the problems that the students, school, and community face. Most important, they learned how challenges that face students outside of school can affect them. Moreover, this experience in working in the classroom enabled them to learn about the education system in Central America. In addition, they learned about Latin American culture in ways that helped them to become more aware of social justice and equity issues. The study concluded that the participants learned from being situated in the culture, particularly from the difficulties they faced from food choices and language and culture barriers.

Overall, whether in New Zealand, London, Hong Kong or Latin America, the pre-service teachers in these studies were situated within different environments that enabled them to learn new knowledge and practice in classrooms within different communities. Despite the differences in place and time of all these study abroad programs, they were similar in the important situated elements of their cross-cultural experiences such as authentic contexts and activities, multiple perspectives, and opportunities for feedback and reflection.

## **Situated Learning in Local Communities**

The literature is clear that enabling pre-service teachers to interact and communicate with other communities in structured ways can lead them to be knowledgeable about others' cultures (Dedeoglu & Lamme, 2011; Ference & Bell, 2004; Smith, 2009; Vaughan, 2005; Wiest, 1998), interact with others confidently (Garmon, 2004; Gomez, 1994; Zhao, 2007), and look at others positively (Hopkins-Gillispie, 2012; Zhao, 2007). In addition, Gay (2002) and Smith (2009) support the claim that teachers can become partners with their students and their families if they find ways to interact with them in informal settings. This implies that, in addition to various study abroad opportunities, another way to situate learning is to connect pre-service teachers with local CLD communities in authentic settings.

One example of the benefits of enabling pre-service teachers to interact with local communities can be seen in Wiest's (1998) qualitative study that examined the effects of a short cultural immersion experience on 86 pre-service teachers. All participants but two were White. The pre-service teachers participated and interacted with different cultural and religious groups such as Jewish, Greek Orthodox and Black churches. One participant spent an evening with a Mexican-American family, and some participants visited small hometown bars and clubs that catered to different groups. Each student interacted with another cultural group in different ways and contexts, but they all were situated in authentic contexts for that group and interacted with experts from that group. For example, the participant who spent an evening with a Mexican-American family learned that he shared many similarities with the family, such as values and personal characteristics. To provide data about what they learned from the experience, participants were asked to write a reflection about their experience including: A description about the group they interacted with, what and how they learned, details about the setting, similarities and differences compared to their own culture, and their feelings as an outsider in the visited community. Furthermore, they were also required to

describe how they could apply what they learned to their future classrooms. Based on her data analysis, Wiest concluded that the field experience was very important and beneficial to the pre-service teachers in different ways. For example, they all felt anxious and nervous about interacting with different groups for several hours; however, they all realized the importance of such an experience. Moreover, they learned techniques for participating in a new culture. Most important, similar to other studies' findings (e.g., Zhao, 2007), the field experience helped them to take away some of their own stereotypes, judgments, misconceptions and fears about the culture they visited. They also experienced some of the difficulties that might face ELLs when coming to a new classroom; this experience helped them to recognize the importance of having ELLs feel comfortable in the classroom. Overall, even this brief situated experience with different cultures gave them an opportunity to explore and learn about others from their own perspective, which can be very useful in their future teaching. Overall, this study supports other situated learning studies that concluded that authentic context and activities, contact with experts, and opportunities for feedback and reflection are important elements when situated learning is applied.

In a similar study, Vaughan (2005) examined the social and academic impact of a short cultural immersion experience on a group of 36 White and 2 African-American pre-service teachers. Before the study began, the pre-service teachers were introduced to different topics about multicultural awareness in order to prepare them to move out of their comfort-zone. The participants were required to spend at least an hour with a minority group to find out how this experience can impact their cultural awareness and the knowledge they can learn for their teaching/ learning process. Data were collected through field reflections and oral discussion about the experience. Although the pre-service teachers were nervous and reluctant to participate in this study, Vaughan found that the pre-service teachers ended their experience with new understandings of how to interact positively with other cultures. This

study agreed with the findings of previous investigations that it is important to enable pre-service teachers to experience being in situations where their culture and language are the minority in order to help them recognize other cultures and minorities in the classroom; he pointed out that it is difficult to understand minority children if teachers do not have an opportunity to meet people from other cultures. Vaughan concluded that this experience, based in authentic contexts and activities, contact with experts, and opportunities for feedback and reflection, provided an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to engage with cultures different from their own, which helped to change some of their fears and stereotypes they may have about other groups.

This argument is also supported by other studies, such as those of Ference & Bell (2004) and Zhao (2007). Ference & Bell (2004) examined the impact of a cross-cultural experience in the southeastern United States on pre-service teachers. Before they started the experience, the twenty-five pre-service teachers participated in different activities to increase their knowledge about Latino students, including seminars, presentations, and reading some multicultural books. Then the pre-service teachers were hosted by 9 Latino families; each family hosted 2, 3, or 4 pre-service teachers for 13 days. The host families were asked to involve the pre-service teachers in all of their daily activities including church, shopping, and eating out, and they were also asked to speak with them in Spanish even if the pre-service teachers knew little or no Spanish. In addition, a Latino guest speaker was also invited to address different aspects of the community. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers visited two industries for two afternoons to learn about the employment and work of the Latino community. Data were collected by observing students, fieldwork reflections, and discussions in a 90-minute seminar held three times per week. The study concluded that the pre-service teachers ended their experiences with new understandings about the Latino community that they could not have gained otherwise. For example, they learned that some of their

assumptions about Latinos were wrong. Moreover, they learned about the difficulties facing the community, such as language, work, and immigration rules, and how these can affect their students. Most important, they learned background knowledge of the Latino children that can be useful to assist them in their future classrooms. In addition, they learned about family relationships, food and other daily activities, which can help them in their future teaching. This experience again shows the importance of situated learning elements such as authentic context and activities, contact with experts, and opportunities for feedback and reflection as described above.

Zhao (2007) agreed with the findings of Ference & Bell's (2004) study; Zhao's study took place in a community similar to Ference & Bell's (2004), as well as in an Asian community, for a one-day cross-cultural experience. The 21 pre-service teacher participants were required to informally interview at least three parents to gain knowledge related to the family, school, and parents' concerns, visit three shopping centers formed by Asian immigrants and run by them, and take field notes, observe the community, take pictures, taste food, and participate in some activities. Data were collected by observation, reflections, field notes, classroom discussion with participants, and pre- and post-experience interviews. Zhao found that this experience gave the pre-service teachers a good opportunity to explore other communities, and learn from experts about their children, their concerns about schools, and their life experience. Overall, Zhao found that this experience helped the pre-service teachers in different ways. First, it helped them to feel in some small way how ELLs may feel when they enter into a new cultural and linguistic environment, and it showed them how they can help these ELLs in their new environments. Second, it helped them to understand how such communities struggle, and to develop new understandings of their contribution as a unique community. Third, it helped them to build cultural knowledge to take to their future



classrooms. The same elements of situated learning found in the studies noted above were also important in Zhao's study.

To sum, cross-cultural situated learning experiences for pre-service teachers have been examined in two different settings: international and local. According to the literature, these two settings can provide situated learning experiences that can be useful to enhance the cultural and linguistic awareness of pre-service teachers, increase their understandings, change their attitudes, support their learning about different education systems, and help them to build new skills that can be useful for their future classrooms. However, experiences abroad cost time and money so it makes sense to take advantage of similar opportunities for engaging pre-service teachers with local immigrant communities; the literature indicates that such experiences with local communities can be as effective as those that take place at an international level (Zhao, 2007). More important than the location are the features of the experience; based on the examined literature, important elements are:

1. an authentic context that reflects real life,
2. authentic activities,
3. exposure to multiple roles and perspectives including experts, and
4. opportunities for feedback and reflection.

Thus these four elements of situated learning form the theoretical framework of the current study.

### **Research Questions**

Although the literature reported a number of studies based on situated learning elements that have examined the impact of cross-cultural experience on pre-service teachers, none of them involved either Arabic culture or Muslim communities. Thus, this current study takes an opportunity to explore the cultural awareness of pre-service teachers through situated learning at a local level in Arab family homes. Moreover, none of the previous

studies included families as participants; this creates another gap in the literature. Therefore this study includes the families as participants. Based on a pilot study (Akasha, 2013) and the literature described above, the questions for this study are:

1. How do the pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings about Arabic culture and language change after they are situated in an authentic cultural context?
2. How do pre-service teachers and Arab families interact in a semi-structured social situation outside of school?
3. How do families react to the experience with the pre-service teachers?
4. How do the pre-service teachers perceive that they can apply this experience to their future classrooms?

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The main purpose of this study was to find out whether, how, and to what benefit for their classrooms learning situated in Arab culture changes pre-service teachers' understandings about Arabic-speaking ELLs and how families perceive the experience. This section describes the participants, context, data sources and procedures, and data analysis.

#### **Participants**

To collect rich, in-depth data for study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Patton, 1990), 25 pre-service teachers (all but one female) in two sections of an Introduction to ESL course in an elementary teacher education program at a university in the Pacific Northwest participated in this study. The pre-service teachers were all of non-Arab heritage. The course was one of the requirements in the teacher education program. The purpose of the course was to provide elementary education majors with research-based practical knowledge to prepare them for their future teaching of diverse students in addition to mini-lessons, culture tasks, and other activities. As part of the course activities, the pre-service teachers were given different options for fieldwork, one of which was having dinner with an Arab family for two hours in the family's home.

Out of the total number of 40 pre-service teachers in the two course sections, 15 pre-service teachers either signed up to participate in a different fieldwork activity or signed up and then cancelled before going to the family's home. Out of the 15 non-participants, 10 of them responded to a question about their reasons for either not participating or cancelling after signing up. Seven of them said they had had a scheduling conflict, whereas one was a "picky eater" so she did not want to bother the family by not eating in their home. The other two cancelled their dinner because one was not comfortable going to a stranger's house for dinner and her partner did not want to go alone (afterwards, when she heard from other

participants about the experience, she felt that she had “missed such a great opportunity”). All participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study.

## **Context**

This study occurred in Arab families’ homes in order to enable direct interactions and give the pre-service teachers opportunities to learn about Arabic culture and language in Arab environments. In other words, this functions as a situated environment for the pre-service teachers (see Figure 1 for details). In this setting, the pre-service teachers and Arab families participated in a meal and conversation. Twelve Arab families (five from Libya, five from Saudi Arabia, 2 from Egypt) volunteered to host the 25 pre-service teachers; the researcher was a participant observer because his family was one of the host families. To enable full participation between families and pre-service teachers, each family hosted two pre-service teachers, with one family hosting three. In the Arab families’ homes, the pre-service teachers had an opportunity to explore their knowledge and perceptions about Arabic culture and language.

Before the visit, the researcher provided basic information to the pre-service teachers to support smooth cross-cultural interaction. These instructions were mostly about general principles that Arab families expect from their guests. For example, it was expected that guests would take their shoes off before going into their house; shaking hands with the opposite sex is not common for some Arab families; Arab families welcome any questions about their language or culture; Arab families welcome their guests to stay longer; and Arab families may offer extra food while eating. The pre-service teachers were encouraged to ask the researcher any questions they might have. One participant's question was about whether to take a bottle of wine as a gift to the Arab family. The researcher responded immediately that it is not expected by an Arab family to receive such a gift because alcohol is forbidden in their religion and therefore it would be considered rude. This question helped the researcher

to realize how difficult the experience could be for both parties because of the differences in cultures.

Figure (1) briefly shows how each element of the situated learning framework was integrated into the experience.

<b>Situated learning element</b>	<b>Situated learning activity</b>
<b>Provide authentic context that reflects real life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>An Arab home where the family goes about its daily life including cooking and hosting.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Provide authentic activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interact with the family.</b></li> <li>• <b>Learn about Arabic culture.</b></li> <li>• <b>Practice the Arabic language.</b></li> <li>• <b>Experience Arabic food.</b></li> <li>• <b>Learn about the education system in Arab countries.</b></li> <li>• <b>Explore Arab family life.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Provide multiple roles and perspectives including experts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Different members of Arab families and other pre-service teachers</b></li> <li>• <b>Previewed materials</b></li> <li>• <b>Researcher's introduction to Arab families</b></li> <li>• <b>Classroom readings and discussion</b></li> <li>• <b>Conversation with Arab families.</b></li> <li>• <b>Learn while observing Arab families' life in their own environment.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Provide opportunities for feedback and reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Focus group discussion</b></li> <li>• <b>Discuss and compare understanding with other teachers</b></li> <li>• <b>Class reflection</b></li> <li>• <b>Class feedback</b></li> <li>• <b>Explore their assumptions with experts (Arabs)</b></li> <li>• <b>Connect their knowledge to future classroom</b></li> <li>• <b>Family feedback</b></li> </ul>

Figure 1. Situated learning elements along with activities

Integrating these situated learning elements (Herrington & Oliver, 2000) within the experience provides a clear picture of how each element is connected with the situated activities.

## **Data Sources and Procedures**

Data were collected throughout one semester using different data collection methods to support triangulation (Golafshani, 2003; Mathison, 1988). Each of these methods is described below with details of how the method was used and how the data were useful to the purpose of this study. At the beginning of the semester, the researcher discussed with the course instructor the steps of the study as they are described below in order to enable him to plan accordingly and to avoid any disruption during the data collection process. The process of data collection was divided into two main segments as follow:

**Before the home visit.** First, teachers were given a KWLS chart (see Appendix A) to collect data about their previous knowledge (K) and the knowledge they wanted to know (W) about Arabic culture and language. Initially, they were asked to complete the (K) and (W) questions only. Then, the chart was taken back from the pre-service teachers. These data were very useful to learn about the existing knowledge of the pre-service teachers and what they considered important. Second, in the same day, the pre-service teachers were given a hypothetical case that involved Arabic-speaking ELLs at school (see Appendix B for the case). The case was used to challenge the pre-service teachers to find solutions based on their existing understandings. The pre-service teachers individually answered three questions about the case after examining it. These data helped the researcher to understand the previous knowledge the pre-service teachers held about Arabic-speaking ELLs and elementary classrooms.

**After the home visit.** First, the pre-service teachers were given back the KWLS chart to collect information about (L), what they learned from their experience, and (S), the knowledge that they still wanted to know about Arabic culture and language. These data were used to learn about the knowledge they perceived that they learned and their perceptions about their experience with the Arab families. In the same day, the pre-service teachers were

also given another copy of the hypothetical classroom case to find out how they understood any classroom issues after the home visit. These data addressed the knowledge that they learned from their home visit. Most important, the data helped to shed light on how teachers might use this knowledge in their future classrooms.

Third, a focus group technique was used to collect data about the home visit experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). For the focus groups, the pre-service teachers were divided into four sessions to make the groups manageable; each session lasted 60 minutes or less. Each group had three to six pre-service teachers. Eight pre-service teachers were not able to attend their focus group interview because of scheduling conflicts. To enable valuable discussion in each group, the participants who visited the same home were placed in different groups, except in some cases where this was not possible. Each focus group meeting took place in a private quiet room after a class session. In the focus groups, the pre-service teachers were asked to discuss open-ended questions together. These questions were focused on issues that the pre-service teachers came across based on the other data sources. The pre-service teachers talked about their experiences in the home visit and compared the similarities and differences among their experiences. These focus groups were audio and video recorded and notes were also taken to follow up with important issues that arose in the discussion.

Fourth, to provide additional data to support the answers to the research questions, each host family completed a survey. This survey was mainly composed of closed-ended questions to encourage participation, with some focus on open-ended questions when more detail was important. This survey was used to learn about the families' and participants' experiences, their interaction, misunderstandings, any interesting stories, and their involvement in general (see Appendix C for the survey).

Finally, as part of their course requirements, the pre-service teachers who participated in this study were also required to write a fieldwork reflection about their experiences with Arab families in their homes. The fieldwork assignment focused on a number of criteria provided by the instructor, including: 1) Provide a summary about their experience, 2) provide in-depth insights beyond surface impressions, 3) reflect on any change of perceptions related to the experience and any possible meanings of what they noticed in the experience, 4) make connections between the experience and language learning, cultural differences, and the elementary classroom. In addition, they were required to make connections between their experiences in the home visit and their prior experience and reflect on how this experience can be applied to their future classrooms. The assignment reflection was graded for those who participated in the study just as non-participants were graded on another fieldwork assignment of their choice.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was an ongoing process including reflecting, organizing, and coding in order to appropriately interpret the data (Creswell, 2009). A general inductive approach was used to turn the raw data into a brief summary and to establish a clear link between the research questions and the findings (Thomas, 2006). In the data analysis process, the researcher first prepared the raw data by transcribing the four focus group discussions and then a native speaker read them for accuracy. Next the researcher read through all the collected data several times for deep understanding of the data content. Through multiple readings, several categories appeared to be important throughout the data. Categories then were minimized after reading the reflections and the transcriptions for similarities. Then qualitative data analysis software (TAMS Analyzer 4.0) was used to organize the categories and retrieve data easily. The reflections and the focus group discussion documents were imported into the TAMS analyzer software; the identified categories were assigned as they



appeared while reading through the data. After that the researcher counted the responses to the closed-ended questions of the survey, followed by reading the open-ended questions several times for a clear understanding and coding. In addition, the researcher used the same categories as they appeared in the pre and post KWLS while highlighting the important segments for each category. Furthermore, the researcher read through the pre and post classroom scenario data several times for deep understanding while assigning categories to the related text in the data. This process was repeated; similar categories were combined. At this point, five main categories were highlighted as important to start the discussion; these were feelings, knowledge gained, language barriers, similarities and differences, and interaction.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

To increase the study validity, data was triangulated using different data sources (Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mathison, 1988). Moreover, participants checked the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. Furthermore, the findings were shared with the participants to judge the accuracy as a procedure of the research validity (Boeije, 2010). To avoid being biased as a member of the Arab community, the researcher asked some colleagues to check for any bias that the researcher might have had during the research process. To ensure credibility, some colleagues looked at the categories that appeared during the data analysis process and their relationships. In addition, a detailed explanation of the data analysis steps is provided, including the categories that emerged to enable clear understandings of the data analysis process and findings. Such action also can help readers to understand the analysis steps and then judge the interpretations.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was that the position of the researcher as an Arab member could have affected data interpretation. However, feedback and comments from a colleague

were very useful to avoid any bias. A second limitation was that the data from families were only collected by survey because other data collection methods such as interviews or observations were not possible. However, to mitigate this limitation, open-ended questions were used along the closed-ended questions to collect data from families and provide opportunities for them to discuss their perceptions. In addition, the researcher also was a participant, as his family was one of the Arab families in the study. This could bias the interpretations, but this participation helped the researcher to understand the experiences of the pre-service teachers in the Arab families' homes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis and synthesis revealed that the pre-service teachers perceived that their situated learning experience with Arab families affected them in different ways. To make it simple and clear, the results and discussion section is arranged based on each research question. The participants' voice is included along with the discussion. To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms are used instead of real names.

#### **RQ1: How do the pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings change after they are situated in an authentic cultural context?**

To find out how their knowledge changed, the pre-service teachers' perceptions were explored before and after the experience with the Arab family.

##### **Before the experience**

Three themes appeared to be important in the data before the experience: stereotypes, feelings of fear and anxiety and classroom solutions.

**Stereotypes.** The data show that the previous stereotypes the pre-service teachers held about Arabs did not help them to feel comfortable about visiting an Arab home. For example, although Jacob appeared to be the only participant with some knowledge about Arabs, he described his experience as "I am not going to lie but I felt that many Muslims were not too fond of Americans and I thought I was going into a dinner where I would be kind of bashed just for being American." In addition, Olive reflected that "I made assumptions and had this picture in my head of eating some uncooked, something mixed with some exotic animal parts. I know this is stereotyping and goes against everything taught to us, but I also know I am not the only one that had this vision when signing up for this dinner." Furthermore, Kristy said, "I wanted to make sure that my clothing wasn't offensive at all because I was under the impression that Arab women were not supposed to show any

skin other than their face. I didn't know if we would be able to communicate and understand one another." The data indicate that all of the participants had some assumptions that caused discomfort before the experience. As Chris said, "I thought it was going to be different, like I didn't think they were going to be so open to answer questions or allow me to put my thoughts into it."

The data show that pre-service teachers also had other stereotypes before the dinner that they later perceived as wrong. For example, Beth said, "I always thought the male/female things, I didn't really know anything about that, I always thought like, not to sound rude, but like the men were better than the women." This idea was also supported by Jacob, who said, "I personally did not think that women in Middle Eastern cultures like the Arabic culture, they were allowed to really talk, like, that much to, like, a man and I know that sounds really bad." Hannah also said, "I thought the Islamic religion was much stricter, and that the individuals within it would be much more closed and private." Similarly, Beth said, "Before this dinner, I always assumed that women would wear the scarf around their face and hair because their husbands would not allow them to be seen." Other stereotypes about Arabs as reported in the KWLS chart are: keep to themselves, radicals, sexist, hookah, gas stations, turban on top of head, men wear long clothing /sandals, women cover faces, powerless women, introverted, women are all oppressed, terrorists, and oil. Obviously, all of the pre-service teachers before the situated learning experience had some assumptions about Arabs. These stereotypes affected their attitudes and made some of them reluctant to go on the visit, and they were very anxious and nervous.

**Feelings of fear and anxiety.** The data show that all except one of the pre-service teachers were nervous before the visit because of the obvious lack of cultural knowledge. For instance, Joyce stated that, "Before going to this dinner, my exposure to this type of culture was slim to none." This lack of knowledge made some participants feel nervous about the

cultural differences. As Beth said “We were nervous about the food and then I was nervous because the cultures were so different and I was afraid to offend them in their own house.” Moreover, lack of cultural knowledge also made Chris wonder about many issues such as “Are we too early? Are we too late? Do we go right now? Do we wait in the car? Are they going to think that we are weird? Should we take off our shoes? What do we wear? We had so many questions!” Similar to Chris, Heather also faced the same situation as she said, “I was really anxious to know what kind of food they were going to have. What should I wear? What would we talk about? Would it be awkward?” In addition, one pre-service teacher (Mary) even clearly voiced that “Before this experience I might have been more apprehensive to have Arabic students in my class because I have little knowledge about their culture/background.”

Another participant, who claimed to also be very nervous because of the unknown, noted that she had the same feeling; Kristy said, “Preparing for the dinner was definitely very nerve-wracking for me.” However, the case of Jacob was a bit different because he was familiar with Arabs due to his work. He commented, “I wasn’t nervous because I worked in the children’s center and I was very hungry.” In contrast, Gloria described her experience at the door as “I froze up like an ice cube!” In her reflection, Gloria described her experience as pushing her “to a level of uncomfortable that I have never felt before. I was completely out of my element, yet I was still in [my town]. It was so interesting to me that I was so nervous, when I kept trying to tell myself it was okay because at the end of the day I may never see them again. I knew I had no need to be embarrassed or shy. No matter what I said, I couldn’t shake it. I think my number one concern was disrespecting their culture. I knew I wouldn’t be doing it intentionally, but I still felt like I was walking on eggshells.” The data overall show that lack of knowledge made the pre-service teachers feel fear or nervous before meeting the

Arab families; lack of cultural knowledge appeared to be the main reason that the pre-service teachers perceived that they were "frozen like an ice cube" or "walking on eggshells."

**Lack of classroom solutions.** The data show that before the visit the pre-service teachers lacked sufficient cultural and linguistic knowledge to recognize issues and propose solutions for the Arabic-speaking ELL students in the hypothetical classroom in the case. Most of their answers before the experience about the issue the students face in the classroom referred to a language barrier, followed by other suggestions such as syntax or grammar. Although the hypothetical classroom issues were mostly related to culture, only four pre-service teachers referred to cultural awareness and/or religion before the experience. In addition, in the solution question, seven pre-service teachers considered teachers gaining cultural and background knowledge as a solution to the hypothetical classroom case.

Furthermore, the KWLS data showed the pre-service teachers' previous knowledge about Arabic language and culture, that 12 pre-service teachers described their knowledge about Arabic language characteristics as nothing. However, only one stated that she knows that Arabic is read and written from right to left. Some of them described the language as hard, complex letters, curvy lines and characters, difficult vocabulary, different characters, very beautiful, very difficult to compare to English, and words do not rhyme. Even though some of the participants had some knowledge, the KWLS also showed a lack of solutions about the case issues. For example, 17 pre-service teachers said that they knew nothing about the important days of Arabs. Moreover, 11 pre-service teachers said they knew nothing about Arab families. Overall the data show that, without at least basic knowledge of the topics listed in the KWLS, it was hard for the pre-service teachers to figure out the possible barriers that face the Arabic-speaking ELL students in the case.

The data clearly show the stereotypes, feelings of fear and anxiety, and lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge facing the pre-service teachers before the experience. This

is in accord with Marx and Moss's (2011) findings, where cultural differences caused anxiety for the participants. However, this fear is also a crucial part of an authentic cross-cultural activity because it enables pre-service teachers to be in a similar situation as many ELLs in the classroom (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Ference & Bell, 2004; Wiest, 1998; Zhao, 2007).

### **After the experience**

The data revealed that the pre-service teachers perceived that their attitudes and assumptions and cultural and classroom knowledge were changed positively after they were exposed to the cultural and linguistic experience with the Arab families.

**Feelings of openness and welcome.** According to the data, the perceptions of fear and anxiety of the pre-service teachers changed positively after they were welcomed by the Arab families. The data indicate that the pre-service teachers did not expect to see this kind of welcoming by Arab families. For example, in the focus group discussion, Tara said, "They were so open and welcoming and they just wanted to get to know us, which is really nice." Many others also supported the significance of the families' openness and welcome; Julie added, "I felt about the same (openness and welcoming). Furthermore, Diane said, "Mariam and her family were all so full of love and they were so welcoming the entire visit." In her reflection about her first experience with an Arab family, Fran highlighted the moment she felt comfortable, as she said, "After just 5 minutes in their home, I felt so welcomed that I knew I would be fine." Some participants even went further to express their feelings of enough comfort to ask questions and participate fully with the family. For instance, in the focus group discussion, Hannah said, "I was able to ask questions and I felt really welcome to ask whatever questions and I think my family felt the same way, it was really a comfortable environment." Furthermore, Jacob realized that, "Aisha and her family were so warm and welcoming and they explained to me that a good practicing Muslim is supposed to give and help others that are less fortunate." Finally, Penny said that "I was not afraid to ask questions

as I thought might offend them because they seemed very understanding of the fact that I don't know a lot about their culture, so they were very nice and explicit and told me stories in addition to their explanations." This first meeting with the Arab family, at least to most of the pre-service teachers, seemed to reject their previous assumptions about Arabs. It was a moment of rethinking and creating a new image based on their own judgment, which can be very useful and helpful to the pre-service teachers about cultural and linguistic knowledge.

**Making new assumptions.** From the data, it appears that the situated learning experience helped the pre-service teachers change their previous assumptions. For example, Chris said, "Before I had my assumptions, then I realized that they were all wrong." In addition, Jacob said, "When I went to the family, the wife was very talkative, and we asked her questions and she was definitely different than what I thought. I just thought that the woman, like, just step back and let the man talk, but it really did not happen like that and I was surprised by that." Moreover, Chris said that "Realizing how wrong the stereotype is about Arab attire was mind blowing." She added, "Prior thoughts and assumptions about Arab people had gone out the window." Most important, the KWLS data show that the pre-service teachers found out that most of their reported stereotypes were not true or were only true in part. Instead, new concepts appeared such as that Arabs dress in casual clothes, not many Americans can list positive things about Arabs, women do not cover in the house, and privacy at home is important. In just one visit, a number of different concepts came out to replace the previous ones, or at least in addition to the previous ones.

The participants realized this change in assumptions. For example, one pre-service teacher reported that, "I learned a lot from the visit that all my questions have been answered." In addition, Beth said that "I just had kind of been hearing things here, hearing things there, so I was kind of, like, putting cloudy pictures together, but, like, going and speaking with them, you actually learn it - ok, well, that was wrong, that was wrong, here is



the right answer. So rather than assuming things, and I mean there are so many things, like, you can't know everything, you have to assume things, but by meeting with the families you can take away some of those assumptions and actually know." This was also supported by Nora, who added that "Or at least have educated assumptions." Moreover, Rose said, "I felt like I learned a lot, even though I was not, like, asking for facts, just, like, the conversation." In the focus group discussion, one pre-service teacher (Tara) said, "I had known a little bit going into it, but I feel like I learned a ton more coming out of it than just that one class that I took." Furthermore, Hannah said, "The judgments we have with different cultures have been molded by what we hear and see in the news. Unless we take the opportunities to get to know one another, we will continue to hinder ourselves." Most important, the KWLS showed that the majority of pre-service teachers reported that they want to be aware of all stereotypes, and learn more about Arab culture.

**Cultural knowledge.** According to the data, this situated learning experience helped the pre-service teachers to develop their cultural knowledge. Beth said, "After speaking with Issa, I now know this scarf is called a hijab and that this is done due to the religion that the Arab culture follows." Also speaking about the hijab, Joyce said, "I want to wear one now because it's, like, I don't want them looking at me for what I look like, but I want them actually looking at me for who I am and so I was just like I have more respect for it in that aspect." In addition, Rose said, "just being in their home I learned so much about family and culture." Moreover, the KWLS shows that eight pre-service teachers reported that they learned that Arab families are tightly knit. Beyond this, six of the pre-service teachers learned that the father is the head of the household in the Arab family. Furthermore, a number of new concepts and questions appeared to be reported by at least one pre-service teacher. For example, polygamy is allowed based on certain conditions (although it is not common), children go to school to support the family, and cousin marriage is not uncommon.

The participants' responses to the hypothetical classroom scenario also show that their cultural awareness changed after the situated learning experience. First, after the home visit, 12 pre-service teachers reported that the issues in the case are related to the teachers' lack of cultural awareness. More specifically, after the experience, six pre-service teachers reported that the possible cause of the issues could be the animal selection. This conclusion meant that they started to realize central aspects of Arab culture. For example, Hannah reported that "Ali is from Saudi Arabia and he is Muslim. Chances are high that he has never had any experience with pig. Pork is forbidden in the Islamic culture." This was also supported by others such as Fran as she reported that, "When I was in dinner with my Arabic family I learned that they did not eat pork because of religious beliefs that pigs are dirty animals. I think that thing could be a large reason why the student has nothing to share about pigs." Lori reported that, "When I visited with Mohammed from Saudi Arabia, he told me they were not supposed to eat pig. But his family really liked goat and lamb. Ali from Saudi Arabia would not eat pig, or maybe know much about it." Finally, in answer to the solution question, the number of the pre-service teachers who reported that learning about students' culture can be a solution increased from seven to 16 after the experience. In addition, the pre-service teachers offered other suggestions that were not suggested before the experience. For example, four pre-service teachers reported that the activities in the case classroom should be related to the students' backgrounds. Also, three reported that the students should be encouraged to share their background knowledge. In other words, the number of pre-service teachers with some cultural knowledge appeared to increase after their experience. However, other pre-service teachers did not show a big change in their responses to the classroom scenario, which makes it unclear whether they can apply their new knowledge.

This situated learning experience also helped some pre-service teachers to understand more about religion. For example, eight mentioned that they learned that it is essential for

Muslims to pray five times a day. In addition, at least one pre-service teacher mentioned learning new concepts such as some Arabs are Christian, they believe in one God, not everyone is super religious, worship at the Mosque is very important, and the Quran has similar stories to the Bible. Furthermore, 10 pre-service teachers said they learned that Ramadan is important to the families and it is a 30 day fast during the day (from dawn to sunset). Although they learned some cultural knowledge, the pre-service teachers wanted to learn more about other issues related to the Arab families. For example, they stated that a number of concepts and questions were still important to learn about, such as religious holidays, new years, beliefs, how the religion works, why weekdays are different, and other days and holidays when students miss school. Overall, having such opportunity with experts appeared to be useful to add some cultural knowledge to their previous knowledge.

**Classroom knowledge.** The data also revealed that the pre-service teachers were able to learn about and discuss some of the difficulties with and the differences between Arabic and English. Five pre-service teachers reported that they learned that Arabic is read and written from right to left. Liz said, “I learned that Arabic is written from right to left, and that it (Arabic) is a phonetic language.” In this situated learning experience, some of the pre-service teachers were even given an opportunity to practice the language. For example, Heather mentioned, “Serena and I were able to try writing our names in Arabic. This was very fun to learn! He also showed us their names in Arabic and a few other words.” Moreover, some participants went further to talk about other language differences. Fran said, “We had asked about the Arabic language, alphabet system, and writing system. We were told all about these topics and about how they write from right to left as opposed to left to right as we write in English.” In the focus group discussion, Penny said, “I learned a lot about Arabic, asked some questions about Arabic and then I learned about the different vowels and how it’s written.” Moreover, in her interaction with the Arab family, Fran said, “We all of us

tried writing in Arabic and writing in English both from the right to left and left to right. Well, the coolest thing I learned is that we hold pencils differently.” Then, a number of new concepts appeared to be reported by at least one pre-service teacher. For example, they noted that they learned that words are written as they sound, the language is pretty and beautiful, and there are different dialects.

Furthermore, there was at least one pre-service teacher who learned that Arabs have a different calendar, different weekend and weekdays, different school days, and two important holidays a year (*Eid al Fitr* and *Eid al Adha*). Participants perceived that this knowledge could be useful to the classroom and it was interesting to learn about the holidays Arabs celebrate. Gloria commented that, “Mariam explained their holidays and important days they celebrate.” Fran realized that there are not many Arab holidays compared to the holidays in the U.S.; she said, “The wife explained that they really only have 2-3 holidays in their country and they think it is crazy that we celebrate so many!” These participants perceived their new knowledge to be interesting as they came across cultural issues that need to be included in the classroom. Liz said, “She (the mother) also mentioned that she does not mind letting her son attend schools and celebrate holidays in the United States. She wants him to learn more about the culture.” Accordingly, Fran stated that, “Recently in all of our classes we have been talking about culturally responsive pedagogy and what we should and should not teach in our classrooms. Because we have always just speculated the opinions of people of other cultures and not actually gotten to ask them, we found this to be the perfect opportunity.” Thus this situated learning was an opportunity that enabled the pre-service teachers to connect their classroom with an authentic experience.

The data also show that it is not only English, but the participants also discovered that learning Arabic was also an issue for the Arab children. Learning Arabic was an issue to those who did not have a chance to learn it before they came to America because they are

growing up in an area where Arabic is not taught. Thus, the pre-service teachers learned about this issue and how the families are affected by the fact that their children struggle in learning Arabic too. Liz said, “Their first child is struggling with learning Arabic, as he was taught English first and speaks English at school and at home.” In addition, Fran said, “They (the family) talked about how much harder they spend to teach him (their child) Arabic now because they did not do it at first and so now with their daughter they’re teaching them both (Arabic) at the same time.” This issue was so important as Diane said, “We talked about in class how a solid [first] language foundation can help the children to learn the second language, so any parental help in the home can aid the students in the classroom.” Although it is not easy to deeply explore the language issue in just one setting with the family, the benefits are many, such as learning about the difference between writing system and articles. Learning about these issues can be very useful to be considered in teaching Arabic-speaking ELLs.

To sum up, it was common to find out that the pre-service teachers had many assumptions about Arabs in general before their visit. However, the data showed that they ended their learning experience with new understandings as a result of their interaction with the Arab families. Interaction with the Arab families was an opportunity to ask questions and learn about the differences. The authentic activities, reflections, and being in the context of an Arab home helped them to explore their own assumptions and hence develop new understandings. Accordingly, the data showed that the pre-service teachers felt that their perceptions and assumptions on different topics such as cultural and classroom knowledge changed positively. This finding agrees with other studies that situated learning experiences (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) can develop cultural awareness (Lee, 2011; Marx and Moss, 2011), support positive interaction (Vaughan, 2005), and take away wrong assumptions (Ference & Bell, 2004). Similar to Lee’s (2011) findings,

this study suggests that situated learning experiences help pre-service teachers to learn about teaching strategies through the lens of ELLs that can be used to enhance multicultural classroom pedagogy.

**RQ2: How do pre-service teachers and Arab families interact in a semi-structured social situation outside of school?**

The data revealed that the home environment helped the pre-service teachers and the Arab families to interact easily after the initial welcome, resulting in a fruitful learning experience.

**Non-stop and informative conversation.** The data show that the majority of pre-service teachers spent a good time with the Arab family in a way that they were able to influence each other positively. In her reflection, Olive said, “Once we sat down and got comfortable, the conversation was absolute non-stop.” The conversation went smoothly and continuously between the two parties while they learned from each other. Nora and Olive said, “We had a constant conversation learning about one another while eating off of the tray that was prepared.” This also was supported by others such as Linda and Lori, who said that, “The conversation was informative and rich, where topics ranged from living conditions, to food, to politics and religion.” Most important is that this interaction between the pre-service teachers and the Arab family members was perceived as meaningful because both parties had a chance to learn from each other and they had a chance to interact positively. Gloria said, “Before dinner, we were able to sit and chat with Mariam about our education and our goals for our future.” In the home settings, a large number of topics were explored, some of which the participants reported were deeply discussed. Heather said, “Serena and I were very interested in what problems the students have when they come to a new school. We talked to the parents about this to get their opinion on what the student struggles with the most.” In addition, Tara and Heidi said, “We felt our conversation with him was deep and allowed us

insight into their culture.” The conversation, in some cases, extended for a long time, which participants reported lead to a deep discussion about important topics based on their interests. For example, Jacob said, “I stayed until around 11 or so and I and Aisha’s husband talked about our religions.” In addition, April said, “Our night consisted of conversation about our educational aspirations and our family lives here in America.” This interaction influenced one of the pre-service teachers to want to share new information with other peers; Nora said, “We had a very informational conversation about different perspectives around the world which led me to thinking about all the classes we are taking this semester. I was constantly thinking about how I could implement his words into my classrooms I am currently in and voice my knowledge from this dinner to my peers.” In this regard, it is important to see how the situated learning could have influence on the pre-service teachers’ learning beyond its initial context. It is also noticeable how some pre-service teachers were successfully prepared to ask questions in order to extend their knowledge about some classroom issues.

**Language barriers.** The data revealed that despite some language barriers, family and pre-service teacher participants used strategies to interact with each other. In one example, Mary and Sara said, “When having a conversation with solely the mother, many language barriers occurred. We all consciously used hand signals and talked slower as a strategy to overcome this language barrier. When hand signals and speaking slower and pronouncing were not enough, the mother would call for her son, in Arabic, to come and help. Her son would come into the room and translate, both mother and son having a conversation in their native languages before addressing us again. We also tried to ease communication by using simplified English.” In another example, Tara said, “The husband did most of the talking; the wife did not talk the whole day at all. She's still learning English so that is, I can understand that.”

Further, in her reflection, Julie said, “We got to interact with people that were not completely fluent in English as well as find out ways to support a student from an Arab culture in our future classroom.” One difficulty mentioned by Beth was understanding whether a language barrier existed or it was something else. She said, “When we were having our conversation, the wife I don’t know if it was her, she did not understand English very well because I know she was still going to the language center. Every time you would ask her a question, like, directly to her, she always looked to him (the husband), and so I don’t know if that was because she didn’t understand us or she didn’t feel comfortable talking to us.” This challenge faced some others, too, where one or more of the family members did not speak English well. Joyce said, “Our family has been here for two weeks so both of them had a big language barrier. They understood most things; I mean both the husband and wife both spoke probably very evenly. The wife and her friend who was there that they admit at the language center did most of the conversation and if they need something translated, they used her, she has been here for six months.” Moreover, in her reflection, Kristy said, “Issa’s English was better than his wife’s, so he did most of the talking.” However, despite the language barrier, the pre-service teachers felt the Arab families welcomed them. Gloria said, “The mother was unable to communicate with us because she knew little English, but she was in our company the whole visit.” Such difficulties that faced the pre-service teachers in the Arab family homes can be a good authentic learning environment that places the pre-service teachers in environments similar in some ways to their future ELLs. Thus, providing an authentic context and authentic activities appeared to be important elements in the experience (Herrington & Oliver, 2000).

**Similarities and differences.** The data show that this learning experience enabled both groups to compare important issues from two different perspectives. Some pre-service teachers were very interested to learn about both schooling systems. For example, Heather



said, “Our conversation focused on how schooling is very different from where they come from compared to the American school system.” Moreover, Gloria said, “Before dinner we talked a great deal about the differences of education from the two cultures.” Liz noted, “We discussed the different cultural holidays that are celebrated in the United States versus Saudi Arabia.” In addition, some pre-service teachers were fortunate to try out some Arab traditions such as sitting on the floor while eating traditional food. This situated learning experience thus helped them be aware of the cultural differences. Tara and Heidi explained, “We were invited to sit on the couch or the floor. We choose to sit on the floor as it seemed most appropriate and we wanted to fully engage in the experience.”

This situated learning experience was also useful to the Arab families to learn about how American culture differs from their own. One pre-service teacher, Hannah said, “I really like introducing our culture, too, because I do not think they realize how diverse the difference is between southern and northern states.” In one setting, the conversation smoothly touched upon some controversial issues. However, the conversation ended up with the realization that there was not a big difference. Jacob described this situation, saying, “We talked about the Quran and everything and a lot of the stories were very similar to the Bible, I was not really that surprised about that because I took a class on it, but I was just surprised that it was pretty much identical and my name is Arabic. I found that out and I learned how to write it.” This interaction was very useful to both groups because they perceived that they were able to understand each other, they were able to learn from each other, and they were able to see how they are similar in many respects.

In short, despite the difficulties that faced the pre-service teachers in meeting with an Arab family, this situated learning experience appeared to have enhanced their cultural awareness and enriched their understanding about Arabs. According to Hopkins-Gillispie

(2012), such difficulties can be useful in the cultural development of the participants, which can affect their teaching, too.

### **RQ3: How do families react to the experience with the pre-service teachers?**

The data show that the Arab families reacted positively to the situated learning experience with the pre-service teachers. Their experience is discussed within the following three themes: feelings of enjoyment, bridging cultures, and sharing culture from families' perspectives.

**Feelings of enjoyment.** The data show that all of the families described their experience positively. Yakoub described the experience with the pre-service teachers as “it was so nice and they are very welcome if they want to know more about our culture [at] any time.” In addition, Noah described it as, “It was helpful and very beneficial.” Then, Moussa said, “Our experience was easy and comfortable because we felt as friends visited us. There was nothing to dislike in this experience.” Moreover, Yousef, supported by Souleman, said, “it was very interesting discussion and the home environment and sitting have stimulated good discussion.” Furthermore, Mohammed described the experience as “Fantastic, meaningful, helpful, and valuable. Everything was fine, but since this is the first time they met us, they were a little bit shy.” In addition, Mariam supported Mohammed about shyness as she experienced such shyness; she said, “I felt one of them was too much concern and not feeling comfortable with our meeting even she wasn’t interested to eat at the beginning then after three hours she was too nice and shared our talks.” Also Aisha described the experience as “It is a trip from one culture to another where every party get a chance to talk, ask questions, share some knowledge about both cultures, and learn a new experience. We liked all the conversations and it was a good learning experience and we will be looking for more opportunities like this one.” In addition, Yakoub commented that “we enjoyed having them

with us and kids were very happy." Overall the families perceived that having the pre-service teachers in their homes was a great opportunity and good learning experience for all of them.

**Bridging cultures.** The data show that, to the families, this experience was important and necessary for their children so they can be served better in school. Yousef described this experience saying, "What I learned from this experience was that sharing our knowledge and experiences in broadening our understanding about several issues." Moreover, Aisha said, "We learned about the process of marriage in America, which is totally different from us. Overall, this experience was a good opportunity for all of us to share, ask questions, and learn some new things." Some pre-service teachers did not have a chance to share their culture; they instead talked more about Arabic culture. All of the families described Arab culture as the main topic of their interaction with the pre-service teachers. However, nine of the families agreed that this experience helped them understand more about American culture.

Furthermore, Yakoub, supported by Dawoud and Souleman, referred to this experience as a bridge connecting two cultures together. This experience enabled them to share their own knowledge, as Issa said, "I like that we had the freedom to speak about our culture and religion." This idea was also supported by Aisha, as she said, "It was very nice to talk openly around many issues that might be difficult to ask otherwise." As a result, all families agreed that this experience helped them to talk about their culture. They also all stated that this experience could be useful to learn about others' cultures.

**Sharing culture from families' perspectives.** The data also show that this experience helped the families to talk about the importance of sharing their personal backgrounds with teachers. Souleman highlighted some important issues related to Saudis, saying, "Teachers should be aware of the differences between Saudi school system and Americans in term of genders issues. For example when mixing both genders in a group might be not comfortable for either of them to communicate and participate in the activities."

Moreover, Noah pointed out that “It is very helpful to both teachers so they can know more about minorities’ cultures and parents’ so they can enrich teachers about their children’s cultures.” Mariam said that, “our children go to schools so it is good for us if we can give them hint about what is the culture of those children that may help them to understand our children more and help them to keep their culture alongside with developing language skills. Also to respect our religious events such as prayer times, *Eid*, and fasting.” In addition to the previous comments, Yousef described the experience as useful because teachers can learn about “How student's own language and culture contribute to their learning and understanding of second language learning and culture and how ESL teachers can tackle challenges students have when they learn a second language out of their environment. In fact, having this kind of conversation or interactions with pre-service teachers, will not only provide good understanding or knowledge required to help Arab learners, but it will also lead to fruitful learning outcomes.” From his family experience, Noah pointed out that, “I understood that teachers might not quite familiar of their students’ cultures and they should know about it.” Most important, the families with children agreed that this interaction with pre-service teachers was very useful for their children. Furthermore, all families agreed that children could be better helped in school if teachers learn about their culture and language. Such opportunity can also provide the families with tools and skills to learn more about schools in the United States and to find better ways to communicate with their children’s teachers. All of the families agreed that they would feel comfortable interacting with teachers in the future.

To sum up, although this situated learning experience mainly targeted pre-service teachers, families also benefitted from this social interaction. First, this interaction enabled them to talk about the difficulties that their children faced in school linguistically, academically, and culturally; this information can be useful to the pre-service teachers while

learning about Arabic-speaking students. Second, the families felt that it was a great opportunity for some of them to learn about U.S. culture while interacting with American teachers.

**RQ4: How do the pre-service teachers perceive that they can apply this experience to their future classrooms?**

The data show that participants learned a number of important strategies out of this experience that can be used in their future classrooms. The following three themes are multicultural classroom environment, school system and gender, and cultural integration

**Multicultural classroom environment.** The data show that this experience with Arab families helped the pre-service teachers to recognize how important it is to show awareness of others. All of them said they were highly affected by what they discovered, as they were surrounded by different people, speaking a different language, and in a completely different environment. Tara and Heidi said, “What we have to remember is how scary it was for us to be in their home, because this is how our ELL students likely feel when they are at school. It is imperative that we take what was learned at this dinner and apply it to being culturally responsive and respectful teachers.” They also said, “It was easy to tell that in making us feel welcome, they themselves seemed more at ease. For this reason, it may be a good idea to see what things we can do for our ELL students that will make them more comfortable. It is apparent; when students are more comfortable they are less stressed and will be better learners.”

This experience was also useful to realize how important it is to accommodate other cultures in the classroom. Nora said, “I think I am more aware of differentiation throughout our society. I realize that each one of my students will come from a different background, have different values, and believe in different things, but that will help make my classroom a more diverse and multicultural place.” She added, “After experiencing meeting with this

family, I can apply my knowledge I made to cultures outside of my own and justify how to help meet the needs of those students in my future classroom based on their culture and background.” As a result of her interaction with a Saudi family, Lori said, “she would feel more comfortable bringing the Saudi Arabian culture into her classroom.” Moreover, both pre-service teachers who visited this family believed that “We would both like to tailor lessons to encompass the entire family, instead of just concerning the mother and the father, as the American culture does in lessons that require family involvement.”

Likewise, other pre-service teachers realized the importance of sharing students’ cultures in the classroom. For example, Joyce and Chris said, “We have also realized that cultures may have similarities and would probably be a really interesting topic to talk about and share in a classroom.” They further mentioned other possible strategies that they can use in their classroom such as “we can have students write about their cultures and share interesting facts; after they share we can make a chart of similarities and differences within the different cultures in the classroom. We can even have students focus on continents and read about all the main cultures in each continent.” Similarly, Hannah supported this idea in her reflection. She said that, “I would encourage students to open up and learn about different cultures and counties with an open heart.” Thus, this learning experience helped create an awareness of the importance of a multicultural classroom for ELLs.

**School system and gender.** The data show that participants perceived that learning about different school systems can be useful to the pre-service teachers’ classrooms. Some pre-service teachers explored things deeply as they learned about school system and gender in some Arab countries. Beth said, “I also learned that in their culture much of the schools are segregated based on gender. I found that Issa doesn’t mind how the U.S school system is with regards to women and men being in the same classroom.” She continued to add that “If I had the opportunity to have a student from Saudi Arabia, I would make sure that they are

comfortable in the classroom first, and if possible ask them how I can make the transition to such new surroundings easier.” Kristy noted that, “The way that so much of the country is divided between men and women was eye opening. I will definitely take this knowledge with me to my classroom. It has created awareness in my mind that in addition to learning a new language, new Arab students may have a hard time adjusting to the co-ed school system that we use in the United States. It may also be extremely hard for Arab boys to adjust to having a female teacher because that is not heard of in their culture.” Furthermore, Kristy said, “I will take this information into account when looking at the friendships and relationships of my students. The dynamics of relationships among cultures can vary so much that is important for me to continue to learn about other cultures to help my students build healthy friendships with one another.” Learning about school system and gender in the Arab families’ home could add new knowledge to the pre-service teachers’ understanding that can lead to fruitful future classroom.

**Cultural integration.** The data revealed that 11 pre-service teachers felt that learning about different days and holidays was useful to enrich the classroom. Because Arabs have their own calendar (lunar calendar) year marked with holidays different from the U.S., the pre-service teachers decided to use a calendar activity in their future classrooms. For example, Julie said, “They showed us something about the calendar and how it is a little different. I think that will be really cool to have, like, if you have a kid from there or something, have that too and show the class and that was interesting.” Additionally, the pre-service teachers learned that parents could be invited to talk about their own holidays in the classroom if English is not a barrier. Fran said, “if we, as teachers, call and ask if you want to come and share about your holidays in the school and she said that was great she would never offer that on her own, she would never come into the classroom and say can I teach about my holidays. But if a teacher approached her and said do you wanna teach about your child’s

holidays, she said, "I would love that, I would totally do that," but she would have to be approached, so I think going out of our way to approach the parents." Other pre-service teachers shared the same experience with their Arab families. For example, Mary and Sara said, "As teachers, we should first recognize, and then celebrate the differences in our classroom. If Ahmed's mother came into the classroom, I'm sure there would be questions that would arise from other students that have never seen a woman dressed so modestly. Instead of ignoring the differences, we will address, educate, and celebrate cultural difference."

In fact, the focus group data showed that this kind of activity was very interesting to the majority of the pre-service teachers because they shared a lot of good activities. For example, Penny mentioned the calendar type where "we say at this particular day this culture celebrates this holiday and learn a little bit about it." Some of the pre-service teachers also noted different ideas on how to enable students to share without fear. For example, Hannah said, "Maybe see if the child wants to share with the class where he goes because maybe, like, the other students can learn something. Do not put the kid in the spotlight though, but if the kid is comfortable sharing with the class mates what he is doing then maybe you can have them share and that can be a cultural moment for the whole class."

The data also revealed that some pre-service teachers realized the importance of including the holidays of Arabic-speaking students in the classroom. Being in their home and listening to their stories about their struggles from living away from their home country, these pre-service teachers learned the importance of including the Arab holidays in the classroom. For example, Penny said, the family she visited struggled to have their kids celebrate their traditional holidays because the parents and the kids are busy in their schools all day. In addition, their traditional holidays have never been recognized in the school though they send some candies with their children in their important days. Penny then realized the importance



of recognizing such traditional holidays in the classroom. Overall the pre-service teachers perceived that the knowledge gained from this experience can help them in their future teaching. Diane expressed her perception that, “After experiencing a dinner with Mariam and her family, I have learned a great deal about their culture and how I can bring this experience into my future classroom, and have learned so much from this family.” Also Linda and Lori said, “We both learned a lot about Saudi Arabian culture, and picked up tips ideas for making students from that part of the world more comfortable in our classrooms.”

In short, all pre-service teachers were able to interact with and learn about Arabs and suggest how they can use this limited learning opportunity to support their future students and integrate culture into their classrooms. This finding fits with other studies that situated learning experiences can develop the cultural knowledge of pre-service teachers in a way that can affect their future teaching (FERENCE & Bell, 2004; Hopkins-Gillis, 2012; Marx & Moss, 2011; Sharma, Aglazor, Malewski, & Phillion, 2011; Wiest, 1998; Zhao, 2007). This finding also agreed with Zhao’s (2007) and Vaughan’s (2005) findings that situated learning experiences help the participants to develop multicultural knowledge that appears to be useful in future classrooms.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, lack of cultural knowledge and understanding made the pre-service teachers feel frozen up like an ice cube or like they were walking on eggshells on their way to an Arab family's home. Although all of the pre-service teachers were overwhelmed while they held their initial pre-visit assumptions, the situated learning experience helped them to gain new understandings and feel more comfortable with Arab people. The majority of the pre-service teachers had a positive experience and they all reported that they had gained something important to them. Joyce described her cultural learning experience in her reflection by saying, "My cultural knowledge was expanded greatly after this experience." She added that "After visiting with this family for three and a half hours my eyes have been opened and my curiosity has been enhanced. Walking away from the dinner I felt enlightened." Moreover, Jacob added that, "I had a great time learning about their family and their culture."

The pre-service teachers affirmed that the situated learning experience had a great impact on them. For example, Gloria said, "I learned so much from Mariam that I will never forget." Furthermore, in her fieldwork reflection about her experience, Fran stated that, "The time we spent with his wife was extremely enriching. I think that I learned more about Arabic culture in two hours from this woman than I have in my entire educational experience." In addition, in the focus group discussion, Penny said, "Actually I wish that we had this opportunity with other cultures too because I feel like I learned so much more for meeting with the families than I did in any of my classes." This learning opportunity was summed up by Joyce, who said that, "I knew nothing, not very much going in. Yeah, and coming out, there was just like a whole new world that just opened up. Wow!"

The findings of this study also agree with other studies that situated learning experiences can have an influence on what teachers do in their future classrooms provided

that certain elements are taken into account, such as authentic context and activities, feedback and reflection, multiple roles, and authentic assessments (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). This current study integrated these important elements into the home-visit and course activities. Similar to other studies (e.g., Hopkins-Gillispie, 2012; Ference & Bell, 2004; Marx & Moss, 2011; Lee, 2011; Wiest, 1998; Zhao, 2007), this current study also included reflections to enable the pre-service teachers to express their understandings based on what they learned from the situated learning experience (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). In addition, the follow up focus group conversations with the pre-service teachers were really important and useful to them because everyone was telling his/her own experience with the Arab family, and therefore the focus group discussion supported the situated learning opportunity. This current study also supports the findings of Zhao (2007) that there is not a big difference whether the study takes place locally or nationally, as both contexts can provide pre-service teachers with some cultural knowledge and understanding. Yet, if it is applied locally, it is neither expensive nor time consuming. Most important, despite the differences between the Arab families and the pre-service teachers, the situated learning experience was beneficial to both groups. It offered a great opportunity for families to explore how important it is to meet with teachers and it also empowered pre-service teachers with some powerful authentic experiences including meeting the family, sharing their knowledge, exploring their understandings, and discussing and comparing their knowledge with each other. Furthermore, this experience was also a challenge that enabled the pre-service teachers to be in such situation where English is not the native language. This kind of language barrier was very important to the pre-service teachers because it was an opportunity for them to practice the same feeling as the ELLs in the classroom, yet they figured out some ways to communicate successfully.

To sum up, it is very noticeable that the pre-service teachers' views on different topics have changed. Although it is not easy to change someone's knowledge and attitudes in a short-time setting, it is important to enable such interaction through professional development programs that can be applied during their teacher education to improve the quality of future classrooms for diverse students. In short, teacher educators can help all of their pre-service teachers have the feelings and experiences expressed in this follow-up email to one of the Arab families:

"I want to thank you and your family again for the hospitality that was shown on Saturday night. The food was absolutely amazing. I ate way too much food because I couldn't stop eating all of the wonderful dishes. I really had a good time talking to you after the dinner and just learning more about your culture and religion. Thanks for letting me stay well past the time slot that I signed up for. You gave me a good understanding of the Muslim religion, even though we didn't go over everything. This dinner really taught me that if I have questions about a culture or a religion when I am teaching I just need to go to a community member from that religion or culture. Please tell your wife thank you for all of the hard work that she put into making me the delicious food. Your family was extremely warm and welcoming. I hope we can get together soon after graduation, because now I am interested in learning more about your amazing culture."

### **Implications for Teaching**

As noted above, this study suggests that pre-service teachers should have a course or experience with local communities, one that focuses on preparing them to work with CLD children and parents. Such interaction with local communities can enable pre-service teachers to evaluate their understandings and help them to understand others better. This kind of interaction can be very useful if it follows the principles for situated learning and is supported

with other activities in the classroom including, but not limited to, presentations and seminars from an expert of the targeted culture. Other activities can include attending dinner and/or other daily activities with members of the target culture. However, before applying such experience with other cultures, teachers need to be well prepared. Lack of such preparedness can hinder them from participating and interacting fully with families who might be different in many aspects. However, this study provided some powerful connections that the pre-service teachers made between their classroom learning and the experience. In addition, more visits means more interaction, so requiring more than one visit or activity can make both groups learn from each other and have more opportunities to explore insights from the other culture.

### **Implications for Research**

Finally, there are a number of issues to be taken into account for future studies. First, this current study situated pre-service teachers in an elementary teacher education program in the home environments of twelve Arab families. Further studies may follow the teachers into their classrooms to examine the influence of the situated learning experience on their work with diverse students as well as their communications with families. Second, situated professional development experiences with in-service teachers can be explored. In addition, Arab culture can be slightly different from one Arab country to another. This study included three different Arab regions (Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt); however, more families from other Arab regions could be included to enrich the findings of the study and provide broader knowledge about Arabic-speaking ELLs.

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## APPENDIX A

### KWLS Chart

**Name:**

In this chart, the most important categories from the pilot study are included in order to help the pre-service teachers to understand some important issues about Arabic-speaking ESL students' culture and language.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>K What I know</b>	<b>W What I want to learn</b>	<b>L What I learned</b>	<b>S What I still want to know</b>
<b>Characteristic s of Arabic language</b>				
<b>Relations within Arab families</b>				
<b>Food</b>				
<b>Important days for Arab students</b>				
<b>Religion</b>				
<b>American stereotypes of Arabs</b>				
<b>Contributions of the Arab world to global culture</b>				

## APPENDIX B

### Classroom Scenario

**Name:**

**Instructions:** Read the following case and answer the questions on the following page based on your knowledge and experience.

It was Friday morning when Mrs. Parker, the science teacher, arrived at the middle school where she taught in eastern Washington State. It was the second week of the new semester, and she was excited to work with all of her new students. After lunch, the sixth grade students arrived in Mrs. Parker's classroom for their biology class. She started her class with some activities for their unit about farming in the United States. She told her students to choose a special farm animal, talk about its benefits to people, and share their answers with the class. Ahmed, a student from Libya, and Ali, a student from Saudi Arabia, arrived late while other students were already working on their activities about farming. All of the students were sitting in groups of four except two groups with three students, so Mrs. Parker decided to send each of the late students to one of these groups. Ahmed was assigned to work with Maria (an ESL student from Mexico), and Nancy. Ali was assigned to work with David, Chao (an ESL student from China), and Antonio (a former ESL student from Mexico).

When Ahmed joined his group, the students already had chosen a cow as their special animal to talk about and share with the class. All the students except Ahmed were talking about their chosen topic to prepare for sharing. The teacher noticed that Ahmed did not participate in the activity with his group. To make him engaged, Mrs. Parker joined Ahmed's group and asked him to name some benefits that people can get from cows. Ahmed talked to the teacher about some of the benefits that he knew, but then he went back to silence as the teacher left the group. The teacher then moved around to see other students' work. Ali's group had decided to talk about pigs, and everyone in the group was talking and sharing except Ali. Again, the teacher joined this group to engage Ali by asking him some questions. Mrs. Parker asked him to share his experience with pigs and the benefits that people can get from it. Ali did not respond to the teacher, just looked at his group and said, "I don't know." Mrs. Parker left the group with some questions in her mind about both Ahmed and Ali's lack of engagement. At the end of the class, Mrs. Parker gave her students an assignment to turn it in the next Friday.

The following Friday, Ahmed and Ali arrived late again to Mrs. Parker's class. The teacher was not happy about their lateness and made a mental note to have the office contact their parents. In the classroom activities, the other students were engaged in evaluating each others' assignments based on her criteria. She decided to have Ahmed and Ali evaluate each other's work with her help. As they started looking at each other's papers, the teacher noticed that the writing of both students was almost incomprehensible. Later in the day, Mrs. Parker looked at Ahmed's and Ali's papers for special consideration and found a lot of spelling mistakes, words with no vowels, many words in the wrong word order, and no capital letters anywhere. The teacher decided to report these extreme problems to a special education teacher to test the students for learning disabilities.

**Instructions:** Answer these questions as completely and specifically as possible.

1. What are some issues or concerns you see in Ms. Parker's classroom?
2. What might be possible causes of the problems/issues?
3. What can the teacher do to solve these issues?

## APPENDIX C

### Family Survey

All Arab families who participated in this study are expected to answer the following questions.

**Instructions:** Select all that apply.

- 1) We talked about these topics
  - a. Arab culture
  - b. Arabic language
  - c. Religion
  - d. Food
  - e. Important days
  - f. Relations within family
  - g. American culture
  - h. None of the above
  - i. Other, please specify  
(.....)
- 2) It was very exciting to talk about
  - a. Arab culture
  - b. Arabic language
  - c. Religion
  - d. Food
  - e. Important days
  - f. Relations within family
  - g. American culture
  - h. None of the above
  - i. Other, please specify  
(.....)

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**Instructions:** Mark to what extent you agree with the following; you may add additional comments if you want to.

- 3) This experience helped us to understand more about American culture
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagreeAdditional comments:
- 4) Based on this experience, we feel **MORE** comfortable interacting with teachers in the future.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

- 5) Based on this experience, we feel **LESS** comfortable interacting with teachers in the future.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

- 6) This interaction with pre-service teachers was very useful for my children

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. Not apply

Additional comments:

- 7) This kind of experience can be useful to learn about others' cultures

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

- 8) Our children can be better helped in school when teachers learn about us

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. Not apply

Additional comments:

- 9) This experience helped us to talk about our culture

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

- 10) This experience helped us to talk about our language

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

- 11) I think this experience with pre-service teachers was fun

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:



**Instructions:** Answer the questions below as specifically as possible.

- 12) What are some important things that you did not talk about that you think teachers should know about Arabic language and culture?
- 13) What did you like about this experience with pre-service teachers?
- 14) How can you describe your experience with the pre-service teachers in the home environment? What did you dislike?
- 15) What did you learn from your interaction with the pre-service teachers?
- 16) Do you have any stories that you want to share? If so, please write them below.