Arab American children's early home learning experiences

Jamal F. Ahmad

The University of Toledo

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A Dissertation

entitled

Arab American Children’s Early Home Learning Experiences

by

Jamal F. Ahmad

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Curriculum and Instruction: Elementary Education

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December 2011
An Abstract of

Arab American Children’s Early Home Learning Experiences

by

Jamal F. Ahmad

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The University of Toledo
December 2011

This multiple case study aimed to characterize the home learning environments of six Arab American families who had at least one child of kindergarten age to understand parents’ perspectives about their roles in their children’s early learning experiences and in preparing their children for entry into U.S. schools. Data included interviews, an oral survey, field notes about home observations and samples of the children’s writing and drawings.

The findings revealed that the Arab American homes were rich environments where parents provided many educational resources and materials. Parents reported that their young children learn about their heritage, including language, religion, family and cultural values, customs and traditions. Analyses revealed that among the case study families, both recent immigrant families and families who have been in the United States for a long time provided the same levels of support in their children’s learning and development.

A cross-case analysis revealed that parents do not view their roles as teachers, nor do they only emphasize teaching skills that will be needed for school. Parents defined their roles as preparing their young children to adapt socially in the school environment
and in life as a whole. They reported focusing on their children’s emotional development, teaching them how to enjoy school and respect their teachers and classmates. Although they teach Arabic and English alphabets and numbers to their children, the parents said that they emphasize obeying rules and overcoming the fear of meeting new friends, regarding these skills as important as academic skills.

Parents reported that they expect teachers at school to teach their children manners and safety issues as well as the basic academic subjects. The parents also expressed wanting teachers to know their children’s personalities, weaknesses, and strengths. They said that they do not want teachers to assume their children are proficient in English.

This study provides information for teachers and educators to better understand the emphasis Arab American parents place on social and emotional readiness, over academic readiness, with their young children.
I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, my wife, and my sons, Maen and Yazen.
Acknowledgements

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From my heart, a special thank you for all these kind people. May God bless all of them.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Purpose of Study

This dissertation is a study of the home learning environments of Arab American children. A primary goal of this work is to enhance general US educators’ understanding of the many cultural factors that may impact the academic and social success of Arab American children as they enter US public schools.

Home Backgrounds Impact School Preparedness

The idea of a child being “prepared for school” in the United States can have different meanings. It may be an indication of the child’s knowledge of basics such as reading and writing letters and numbers or identifying shapes and colors. It may mean that the child has seen the inside of the classroom and knows how the day’s activities are structured (Burns, Griffin, Snow, & Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, 1999; Gullo, 1994). It could also simply mean that the child has reached certain developmental stage, such as using the bathroom and feeding him or herself without assistance (Meisels, n.d.). In this study, a child’s “preparedness” refers to how readily he or she will adapt to the school culture, learning basic literacy skills, making friends, listening to teachers, and enjoying the experience.

Children entering American schools have differing levels of preparedness, or ability to assimilate to school culture, based on their cultures and backgrounds. While some are native to the United States, others are recent immigrants still adjusting to a new culture (Lewis & Doorlang, 1991). The level of preparedness for these students is due in part to the degree their parents are educated, or at least familiar with the expectations of
the United States education system. First generation immigrant students born to uneducated parents may have the most difficult transition to school. They may often come from home environments that have different views and learning expectations from those of the school system. They may also need more guidance and help to be successful. Therefore, educators must be sensitive to different minority students, their socioeconomic backgrounds, and their differing home environments (Thao, 2003). Children from these different home environments may not engage in classroom activities in the ways many educators expect. They may be obedient, but also shy or introverted. The source of these behaviors has been linked to the influences of the child’s early home environment (Tedesco & Bradley, 1980).

Many researchers agree that early home experiences play an important role in children’s lives, but have various explanations about how these experiences might affect or contribute to children’s academic and social development. For example, some researchers have focused on how different cultural and linguistic home environments have played a role in children’s academic performance in the school environment (Tharp & Yamauchi, 1994). In the following section I describe several researchers’ studies and thinking to examine the ways in which they view the role of early home experiences in children’s development.

There is broad consensus that early home experiences affect both social and cognitive dimensions of children’s development. For example, a report from the Carnegie task force on meeting the needs of young children (1994) stated that the early home environment is a major and long lasting influential factor in the child’s cognitive development. It affects the child’s brain functions as well as his social skills. The report
also highlighted the importance of the quality of the child’s environment in stimulating the child’s ability to learn. Similarly, a study by Downer and Pianta (2006) found that early home experience plays an important role in shaping a child’s initial cognitive development, affecting verbal comprehension, short and long term memory, and auditory processing.

Indeed, results from a meta-analysis of numerous studies examining the connection between home experiences and cognitive development, show that the quality of the family environment and the quality of children’s early and later environment are predictive of performance on attention and memory tasks. The quality of various early home experiences has also been used to predict individual differences in attention, memory, and planning in first graders (NICHD, Early Child Care Research Network, 2005).

In addition to impacting cognitive development, multiple studies have reached the conclusion that children’s early experiences with their families were found to play an important role in influencing social development (NICHD, Early Child Care Research Network, 2003). In particular, researchers have found that early home experiences play a critical role in the transition from home to school (Tedesco & Bradley, 1980). As Sankar-DeLeeuw stated, “early life experience can powerfully impact children’s attitudes towards learning and later achievements in education” (2007, p. 93).

Similarly, Moje and her colleagues, building on work done by Luis Moll, have suggested that early home experiences provide children with “funds of knowledge” that impact literacy (i. e. reading, writing, and talking) development, and relationship building. The child relies upon their funds of knowledge when transitioning from home to
school (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). Basing education on the funds of knowledge concept, Luis Moll and his colleagues have suggested the need to improve resources in the home and community instead of focusing only on improving the resources in the school setting. This is because the child encounters the resources at home earlier than the resources at school. Moreover, Moll emphasizes the need for teachers to learn about the children’s background and to understand them not just as students, but as individuals with experiences in multiple activities. In doing this, teachers can more effectively integrate classroom lessons into the child’s real world environment (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001).

In sum, these studies indicate that early home experiences play an important role in shaping children’s learning and that they impact children’s literacy as well as social and cognitive development. However, studies focusing on the early home experience of sub-populations, and in this case particularly on Arab American children, are scarce.

The Problem Statement

The US National Board on Children and Families in a report called Immigrant Children and Their Families stated that “first and second-generation immigrant children are the fastest-growing segment of the U. S. population under age 15” (p. 73). Additionally, the Board observed that it is assumed these immigrant children do not adjust to school and that their academic performance suffers. The assumptions lump together all immigrant children in a homogeneous group, and do not distinguish between different cultures and backgrounds. The Board points out that this assumption is inaccurate because a child’s needs depend on many factors, including socioeconomic status, English proficiency, and home culture (Board on Children and Families, 1995).
Because of all of these influencing factors, children from different cultures and backgrounds are not the same in their abilities and experiences. For example, what an Arab American child learns at home (e.g., learning about his culture, rules, values, or language) will not be the same as what an Anglo American or Chinese American child learns. This is because the value system (set of values, norms, behaviors accepted by individual or a society) in each home culture differs (Alldredge, 1984; Ajrouch, 1999; Abraham & Shryock, 2000; Dwairy, 1997, 1998; Vang, 2010).

Arab American immigrant families have been particularly understudied (Nieto, 1996). There is little information about Arab American children in general, and even less information about their learning experiences. This is notable given that there is more research on other minority groups that are smaller in number than the Arab American minority. This may be because Arab American children have not tended to fail in school in as large numbers as other minority groups have (Nieto, 1996). Nevertheless, Suleiman (1993, 1996) suggests that the lack of information about the history, culture, and learning experiences of Arab Americans has negatively impacted how Arab American children are viewed by their peers as well as how they view themselves.

To combat the misinformation, some researchers have attempted to gather accurate information about Arab American children. They have explored the impact of the home environment, investigating how culture (e.g., family learning style) affects or shapes the child’s learning and behaviors.

For example, results from a study by Alldredge (1984) show that early home experiences for the child were a reflection of the home environment. She also observed that Arab children were taught to be very obedient and dependent. She stated that these
children required more attention because they waited to be told what to do rather than taking initiative. Such behaviors could easily be misinterpreted by teachers who are not sensitive to the role early home environment plays in a child's development and how that role may be different among sub-populations.

Teachers, particularly kindergarten teachers, might clearly observe some of the differences in children’s behaviors in their classrooms, but they may not understand why a child behaves in a different way. For example, if a child cannot speak English as fluently as his classmates, he may refrain from participating in classroom activities and not perform as well. Teachers might erroneously judge the child as lacking in cognitive ability, when in fact the child simply cannot understand English.

While this dilemma may face a child from any minority child whose native language is not English, the nature and extent of the problem within the Arab American sub-population has yet to be extensively examined the way it has for other minority groups. Therefore, this study focuses only on Arab American children to uncover how they learn in the early home environments and what unique issues they face entering school.

The Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, if teachers are familiar with and able to understand the nature of learning experiences of Arab American children, they will know what the children practice at home before entering school. With that knowledge, teachers may understand the children’s social, and language abilities. They could then be better able to interpret the children’s behaviors correctly instead of erroneously judging the child as lacking in cognitive, social, behavioral or language
skills. Many researchers (Adeeb & Smith, 1995; Al-Batal, 1988; Elkholy, 1976; Neito, 1996; Sawaie & Fishman, 1985; Suleiman, 1996) have mentioned that teachers should have at least a minimum knowledge about the Arab children in their classrooms – their prior linguistic experiences, an understanding of how they have arrived in the US (their moving history), and the general value system of their culture. Suleiman (1996), for example, stated that with knowledge of relevant cultural information about their students, teachers could make adjustments to the curriculum and include these students in all aspects of scholastic life.

Yet, even the researchers mentioned above have not examined children at their homes to learn about their early experiences. Instead, some of them raise the question of why Arab American children tend to be more successful in schools. They suggest it is because these children come from “voluntary” immigrant families who originally came to the U. S. to obtain more education. Another reason is because Arab families stress the value of education and see it as an essential part of the social growth of their children (Elkholy, 1976).

The second reason this study is significant is that it examines how parents described their roles in preparing their children for school and how they perceived the schools’ role as well. Learning about parents’ perceptions of their roles and the school’s role in teaching their children will be another important message for educators, teachers, and policymakers. Information of this kind can generate discussion about the question of how schools may better serve children from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds.

Third, this study aims to show the type of support (e.g. incorporating materials or objects in the children’s home learning experiences) parents provide for their children at
home. Learning about the type of support parents provide for their children could help teachers, school administrators, and policy makers know about the support available for these children at home. With such information, teachers, school administrators and policy makers can make better-informed decisions about what might be added at school or improved to help these children adapt to the school environment.

Finally, the study could offer insight to teachers and administrators to identify targeted areas where support is needed for Arab American children. Educators will have direct evidence to support the creation of programs that may benefit children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They might ask what is available in their district for these children, what is already being done to meet their needs, and what can be added or improved. At a classroom level, learning about the children’s home can provide teachers with a deeper understanding of their students’ background and may help them develop different teaching strategies that better fit students from diverse cultures (McIntyre, Kyle, Moore, Sweazy, & Greer, 2001).

Examining what the child learns at home, what types of support parents provide, and how parents described their roles and the school’s roles towards teaching their children could provide distinct information about how the child develops at home. Accessing this type of information, schools can provide the help needed to these children from different cultures and backgrounds transitioning to the American school environment.
Theoretical Perspectives

Home as a Child’s First Learning Environment

This research study builds on the idea that child learning begins before entering school and that home context is the first place where a child encounters and learns the important basics for both school and life as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Piaget, 1970; Rogoff, 1990; Saville-Troike, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

Generally, the home environment is the first environment a child encounters, and interacts with. Mott (1997) defines the home as an emotional and social place as much as a physical place, which exhibits a family’s values, beliefs, customs, and attitudes. He also asserts that home is also a social realm in which is defined by the interpersonal relationships of the people who live there or frequently visit and the skills and abilities of those people. Bronfenbrenner and Crouter define the environment as “any event or condition outside the organism that is presumed to influence, or be influenced by, the person’s development” (1983, p. 359). Older concepts of environment tended to view it as a set of forces that shape the individual, as though the person were just a passive punching bag (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1991).

Under any definition of the early home environment, children have many learning experiences there. In addition to learning knowledge, skills, and their native language, children also learn about their own cultures, values, and beliefs. Accordingly, children enter school having already had many learning experiences. The most basic of these learning experiences teaches the child about culture. A child learns about culture the way he learns about language, in the home with his family. By the time the child reaches school age, he has already learned the basic values and beliefs of the culture, as well as
the appropriate behaviors for socialization. In effect, the child has learned how to learn (Saville-Troike, 1978).

**An Ecological Perspective on Learning and Development**

A major theoretical perspective that has guided my understanding about Arab American children’s early home experiences is Bronfenbrenner’s notion that the home serves as the central learning site for children. The ideas developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) focused on the importance of the environment in which the child lives. In his theory, that he called an “Ecology of Human Development,” he asserted that a child’s environment consists of four systems or levels of interactions: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem.

Bronfenbrenner’s theory suggests that the interconnected levels of environment each have a unique impact on a child’s development. Children develop in relation to their family, school, community, and society within each of these different levels or systems. The innermost system, the microsystem, is the first system a child encounters and is therefore the most important for developing basic skills. It is this system that is of primary interest in this study.

A microsystem can be any place that fosters interaction and engagement. This can include a preschool, playground, and so on. Bronfenbrenner identified the home and parents as the main examples of microsystems and he stresses the importance of the role these home microsystems play in governing how the child learns and develops in all other contexts because they are the first microsystem that a child encounters (1979).

Bronfenbrenner’s model also highlighted how the levels interact. For example, Bronfenbrenner hypothesized that a child was more likely to learn to talk in a setting
where parents or others were obligated or encouraged to talk to them. Parents must not only want to read their child a book, but have in place methods that allow this activity to occur, such as one parent reading while the other parent completes household chores. Thus, the home environment, and more specifically the parents’ actions, are important for the child to develop the most basic skills (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

**Sociocultural Perspectives on Learning**

Another theoretical perspective important to this work is a sociocultural perspective about learning and development (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986). This theoretical perspective has an emphasis similar to Bronfenbrenner’s on taking into account the context in which human activity occurs.

Vygotsky asserted that how children learn should be studied in natural environments (1962). The home is one of these natural environments where social activity occurs. At home, the child has plenty of time to learn how to communicate and interact with people, including parents, siblings, and other family members or close friends. As Dodici, Draper and Peterson (2003) state, a sociocultural approach to child development stresses that infants, toddlers, and young children learn many skills through interactions with adults.

Vygotsky asserted that a child’s interactions with adults are imperative for proper cognitive development (1986). More specifically, Vygotsky developed the idea of a “Zone of Proximal Development.” He defined this as the distance between the child’s actual abilities to solve problems independently and the child’s potential ability to solve problems with adult guidance (1978, p. 86).
Vygotsky pointed out that by using the notion of a Zone of Proximal Development, it “enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (1978, p. 89). Thus, in a home environment, the interactions with adults are the foundation for development of the child as a child is exposed to experiences and opportunities to engage in tasks beyond their current understanding or independent skill level, but is assisted by more knowledgeable and skilled people in the environment. It is only with this foundation that the child can go on to consciously control his own actions.

Similarly, Rogoff (1990) proposed that a child’s development of skills requires that he interact with a teacher, or more knowledgeable person. The teacher in the early home environment is usually the parent. Accordingly, children develop learning skills by interacting with their parents. This model suggests that the more a child interacts with their parents, the more skills they will develop.

The Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions within the contexts of six particular cases:

- What is the nature of the home environments in six Arab American families with 5 year-old children in Northwest Ohio region of the United States of America?

Under this question the following inquiries are made:

A. How do parents in these families describe their role in preparing their children for school?

B. What types of materials/objects do parents provide for their children?

C. In what ways do parents say they engage with their children?
Given the nature of the research questions, I found a qualitative inquiry to be the most appropriate method to obtain answers. This method enabled me to directly interact with the individuals and observe them in their environments. With case study approach, I was able to note non-verbal aspects of the individuals and their homes that would not be conveyed in a written survey, which emphasizes verbal information (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

Terms and Definitions

In this study the following terms will be defined as follows:

**Arab**: The term “Arab” alone describes a multi-cultural, racial, and ethnic population (Abudabbeh, 1996). An Arab can be Muslim, Christian, Jew, or of some other belief. Most Arabs speak Arabic as a universal language, though dialects of Arabic differ greatly according to country or region (AL-Khatab, 1999). For the purposes of this study, an Arab is one who is from a country whose predominant language is Arabic.

**Arab American**: A person who lives in the United States and whose native language is Arabic, regardless of religion, country of origin, or the period of time the person has been in the United States.

**Early home learning experiences**: The social, cognitive, and literacy skills which include, but are not limited, to the language skills, family learning style, self-learning, and learning from different resources such as television, computer, internet, or books.

**Learning**: What the child acquires from knowledge, skills, behaviors, values, and attitudes due to experience or practice.
**Home environment:** The physical and the social place in which the child lives and learns about the norms, beliefs, rules, and values from parents, siblings, or visitors. It is also the place where the child learns skills, language, knowledge, etc.

**Family learning style:** The rules, values, beliefs, roles, and behaviors parents require their children to learn and follow.

**Family structure:** The roles each member of the home has or is supposed to fulfill. The type of relationship that exists between parents and children, as well as siblings and extended family members (if present).
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This study examines the home environment of young children from the Arab American sub-culture of contemporary America. It encompasses a broad spectrum of issues requiring attention to ideas such as impact of culture on childrearing beliefs and the challenges inherent in schooling in a diverse American society. In addition, my work demands examination of the existing research literature related to young children’s home environments and parental behaviors in all sub-cultures of the U. S., including the Arab American sub-culture. Although my work pertains to the Arab American community, there are few existing studies that address this sub-culture in particular. I have reviewed the studies that do exist, as well as those studies of other sub-cultures that investigate the same issues as the ones explored here.

In this literature review I begin by describing some of the broad concepts and then narrow my focus to examine research done specifically about Arab American children with attention to how my work fits within this context. To understand the home as a culture and how the home impacts the child’s learning and developing, it is important to examine how culture influences learning and it is to this relationship I turn next.

Culture and Learning

To ask American schools to accommodate the learning needs of children from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds first requires an understanding of the children’s background. The background consists mainly of what the child has learned at home before entering school. Values, behaviors, language skills, foods, holidays, dress styles, communication styles, and family relationship are all aspects of the home culture.
that comprise a child’s background. A child has already learned a communication style and a code of behavior at home by the time he or she enters school (Saville-Troike, 1978). Cultural values have informed family structure and social interaction, creating the foundation of a child’s earliest learning experiences (Educational Research Service, 2003). Identifying these aspects is essential to understanding where a child comes from and how a child learns (Nieto, 1996).

There are many examples from research that show the impact of culture on learning. Culture, more specifically, home culture affects the ways children receive and process information (Bennett, 1995). For example, social class or the type of community surrounding the child impacts the child’s learning style at home. In other words, the community culture affects the smaller culture, which is usually the home, and the home, in turn, affects the child’s learning style.

Gardner (1983) asserts that the “intelligences” a child develops early on at home are determined by the intelligences that the home culture, and by extension the community culture, values. The child needs to be given opportunities to explore and grow in a type of intelligence early on in the home in order for the child to continue to develop that type of intelligence once in school.

A study by Heath (1983) demonstrates how parent-child interactions differed between the middle and lower classes, which, it can be argued, have cultural differences (Purcell-Gates, 1996). Heath observed that because reading and writing were not high priorities for the adult members of “Roadville,” the children did not value or show interest in writing either. Children of Roadville were not encouraged to improve their writing skills before entering school.
In comparing the importance of reading in each community, Heath found that Roadville members highly regarded reading. On the other hand, Trackton members did not highly regard reading and did not read for their children, nor did they provide reading materials in the home. In both cases, the children’s experiences before entering school caused them to suffer in an academic environment.

Other studies also show that home culture impacts the child learning style differently from how school impacts the child learning style. For example, a study by Kawakami (1995) on learning styles at home and in grade school showed that the two styles contrasted. At home, learning was initiated by the child and involved group play and talking. However, at school learning was initiated by the teacher and relied more on independent tasks. Silvern (1988) observed that whereas learning at home involved cognitive development and emotional dimensions, learning at school was focused almost entirely on cognitive development only.

Similarly, a study by Sindell (1987) observed how Mistassine Cree children are taught at home to be independent and complete tasks cooperatively, but at school they are taught to rely on the teacher and be competitive. The values the child learned at home were in opposition with the values the child learned in school.

Even the communication style of children in a specific culture affects how they learn at home. Arab culture values sustained eye contact as a sign of respect (Argyle, 1975). Conversely, south Asian cultures regard direct eye contact as a sign of disrespect. In American culture, eye contact can communicate respect, but too much can cause people to become uncomfortable and too little can convey untrustworthiness. Children who learn a certain communication style at home may be misunderstood in school. They
could be viewed as rude or disrespectful, even though this is the accepted practice within the home culture (Schott & Henley, 1996). If the value system of the home culture differs from the value system of the school, children’s learning and development is likely affected.

In addition to the studies conducted on how culture affects learning, there are also many examples in historic and contemporary contexts that illustrate this dependent relationship.

Historically, it seems that culture and learning affect each other. Society members grew up learning to serve themselves or to serve the community, depending on the type of society in which they lived. Some used learning as a way to develop the individual self. Others used learning as a way to develop individuals for one specific purpose, with the ultimate goal of furthering the development of the whole society. Such was the case in Sparta, which valued the collective over the individual, so children were trained at a young age to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the whole society and were taught strict obedience to their superiors and any adult they encountered. They were taught how to endure pain, and become accustomed to harsh living conditions. The girls as well as the boys were under a strict regimen of music, dancing, and singing (Marrou, 1982).

In another ancient history context, Hellenistic culture shows another example of how culture affects learning. For example, children were taught good behavior and how to socialize. These skills were considered more important than literacy. A successful person was one who grew up in the company of a good family with good friends, not one that had any technical skills. The focus was on developing character for society, not
technical skills for specialized jobs. Because the Hellenistic culture valued the free man as the supreme ideal, learning also focused on how to achieve that ideal (Marrou, 1982).

These two examples from the history demonstrate how historically culture has dictated how individuals learn and their purpose for learning. The skills children develop and the knowledge they acquire relies on the demands of the culture in which they are raised.

In addition to historical contexts, there are contemporary contexts where the culture-learning relationship is identifiable. However, there is also the challenge of defining what culture encompasses. For example, home, school, and community may all be considered as separate, distinct cultures. As such, learning may occur in different cultures or contexts where the person interacts with people at home, school, or in the whole community. When the culture—home, school, and the community as a whole—changes, then the goals, the types, and the needs of learning will also change.

Over time, societies expand and change. Each society is composed of different people from different cultures and backgrounds. Moreover, each home culture socializes and teaches their children different values. Researchers have examined how different home cultures affect and socialize the child’s learning and how learning is differ from home culture to another. For example, in Arab American homes, children are taught to show respect for authority and to adhere to traditions (Vang, 2010). Alldrege has also found that Arab American children have been raised to be obedient and dependent, and respect the authority of their parents (1984).

American parents, on the other hand, teach their children to be self-reliant at a very early age. They teach sociability by putting their child in situations where they can
learn by themselves. Parents teach independence, autonomy, and social interaction through daily child care routines (Richman, Miller, & Solomon, 1988). Therefore, American parents take on the responsibility to help children balance individual needs with the needs of others. They do not focus on teaching the child how the child fits into the larger group (Power & Manire, 1987).

These two examples from both cultures show the link between different home cultures and different learning styles and how learning is differ when the home culture is differ.

The works of Vygotsky's (1986) and Rogoff (1990) can be additional examples of the link between culture and learning. Their findings show that people develop their learning when they interact with each other in different contexts. According to their sociocultural theoretical position, learning occurs through people’s interactions with each other: and social interaction enhances learning. Therefore, when a person moves from context to context and interacts with different people, then the kind of learning differs. For example, what the child learns at home when he interacts with parents will differ from what he will learn at school from teachers and what he learns from other people in the whole community or close friends. Different cultural contexts provide different kinds of interactions with different types of people. As a result, different kinds of learning experiences occur.

An example would be when the child moves from the home culture to the school culture. The value system and rules the child has learned at home will be different than the value system and rules in school. The child has entered a new context when he enters school. The new context requires him to learn a new set of values and rules so that he can
fit into the school culture and succeed. In other words, for the child to be a student and be part of the school, he must learn the new set of values and rules.

In contemporary contexts, researchers have gone farther to examine the effects of parents and family structure on children’s learning experiences. They have found that parents and family structure play an important role in affecting many aspects of child development including behaviors, social adjustment, academic performance, emotional status, literacy skills, learning, self-esteem, independence, and personality. It appears that parents and family structure affect nearly all facets of the child’s learning and development. I next describe examples from research addressing the role parents and family structure play in the child’s learning and developing.

**Research on Parenting Styles and Family Structures**

Research has shown that parents play a significant role in shaping their children’s early experiences, both negatively and positively. Children learn through interacting with and when observing parents (Bandura, 1969; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985). For example, negative family interactions may affect the child’s behavior later. These negative family interactions may provide reinforcement for aggression that is generalized from home to other settings (Patterson, Capaldi, & Bank, 1992) and develop disruptive behaviors (Campbell, 1995). “Close supervision, high demands, and other manifestations of parental authority provoke rebelliousness in children” (Baumrind, 1973, p. 33).

On the other hand, positive parent-child interactions have been found to help the child’s later skill development and social cognition (NICHD, Early Child Care Research Network, 1999). “Parents who encourage their children and avoid labeling the child as bad, stupid, and so on are helping her or him build a positive self-concept and feelings of
worth and self-esteem” (Germain, 1991, p. 266). Cazden (1983) also argues that parent-child integrations through games or when parents read books to their children are valuable to the children’s development. Results from a study by Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, and Franze (2005) show that parents’ functioning and the quality of the home environment were significantly related to children’s literacy and social outcomes and to their subsequent educational success.

The level of parental interaction also determines what children learn and experience at home. Bandura (1969) states that children learn through interacting with and observing parents. Lamb et al., (1985) mentions that the level of interaction or engagement affects learning as well. This means that children learn about the world around them via daily interactions with their parents and other members at home.

Parents are also found to play many roles in affecting the child’s early learning and literacy. For example, Wolery (1999) states that parents influence the chances that their children will be successful readers and that children who lack literacy in the early years are at greater risk for having difficulties learning to read than are children from home environments that are literacy rich. Children who readily learn to read tend to have families that have read to them often and regularly, that talk with them about letters and words that encourage children’s questions and engagement in print related activities. Children from environments without these activities are more likely to encounter reading problems.

Additionally, children learn from their parents how to develop and adapt socially. Rubin & Mills (1992) assert that parent interactions with their children are some of the most important foundations for a child’s development and social adaptation.
Psychologist Diana Baumrind (1991) studied the effect of parent relationships in more depth. She used the child’s academic achievements, behaviors, and social interactions as variables in examining the relationship of parents and children. She considered the home environment and specifically parents’ “parenting practices” to examine the question of why some children have more behavioral problems, less success in school, and less social competence. Through her research, Baumrind (1991) categorized parenting styles as authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, or uninvolved. Results from her research show that different parenting styles can impact children in different domains positively or negatively. For example, they can be a positive influence by teaching the child to be independent. Conversely, they can be a negative influence by imposing absolute control on the child.

The type of parent can shape a child’s behavior by teaching them how to respond to rules or directives. Authoritative parents show children the reason behind rules. In this way, children learn to seek the reason behind all rules and then decide whether to obey (Baumrind, 1973). Conversely, authoritarian parents teach the child to follow orders without giving a reason why they should be followed (Alldredge, 1984; Baumrind, 1971; Dwairy, Achoui, Abouerje, Farah, Sakhleh, Fayad, & Khan, 2006; Dwairy, 1997; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

In general, authoritarian parenting styles have been found to have negative effects on children’s behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Baumrind, 1973; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Paterson, Capaldi, & Bank, 1992; Steinberg, Blatt-Eisengart, & Cauffman, 2006; Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992), academic performance (Baumrind, 1971), and social
adjustment (Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Pawlak & Klein, 1997).

In the case of Arab and Arab American families, research to date has suggested that the Arab and Arab American parenting style tends to be authoritarian (Dwairy, 2006, 1997). As this study is a descriptive case study about Arab American children and their learning experiences, examining the impact of an authoritarian parenting style on the children’s learning is relevant. The goal of this descriptive study is not to show whether these Arab American families are practicing the authoritarian style with their children; however, citing examples of its occurrence (or of the occurrence of other parenting styles) provides a bigger picture about the trends already identified in research.

In terms of academic performance, Alldredge (1984) has mentioned that because Arab and Arab American children are raised to be dependent, they may find it difficult to take initiative or complete tasks on their own—is because they waited to be told what to do rather than taking initiative. Vang (2010) has stated that Arab American parenting styles can affect children’s academic achievement in school because Arab Americans generally value group orientations, whereas the U. S. educational system is oriented on the achievement of the individual. Therefore, the Arab parenting style, which is generally categorized as authoritarian, might cause children to seem less competent at school (Dwairy, 2006, 1997).

Regarding social adjustment, Arab and Arab American children have been generally characterized as being raised to be loyal to their family, culture, religion, and values. Because some specific elements of their background may differ from the value system American society as a whole, Arab American children may have issues with
social adjustment in school and beyond. They may find it difficult to fit in with social
groups, or if they do adjust to their social surroundings, they may have trouble
reconciling their American social life with their traditional non-western home life. Vang
(2010) stated that Arab American students’ loyalty to their culture and religious values
may strain their social interactions. This strain has a negative impact on the child’s
internal feelings and self-concept. This may be exacerbated by an authoritarian
parenting style as an authoritarian style has repeatedly been found to be correlated with
negative self-perceptions (Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988; Lamborn,
Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Pawlak & Klein, 1997).

Along with the parenting style affecting learning and developing, family structure
has also been considered an important factor affecting children’s academic achievements,
their confidence and self-esteem, as well as the way children interact and communicate
with others. For example, Cooksey and Fondell (1996) stated that the home environment
is created in part by the family structure. They observed how father-child interactions
affect academic performance. The study found that the fathers’ time with the child
correlates to the child’s performance. Webb (1990) stated that a family’s lifestyle
affected how children learned.

Children learn about confidence and self-esteem at home from their parents. They
also learn how to build relationships through their interactions with their
family. Schoon and Parsons (2002) stated that family context plays an important role in
enabling young children to develop their competence. More specifically, The Board on
Children and Families (1995) emphasized that early home development depends largely
on the family structure and parental behavior, and that this holds true for both native and
immigrant children. Similarly, Hess and Shipman (1965) argue that how a family is structured determines how the child will communicate.

In the case of Arab American families, some researchers indicated that socialization by virtue of living in America has changed the family structure. Whereas major decisions were traditionally made by the father, now decisions are more likely to be made together by the mother and father, and even the children (Vang, 2010). This change could give children the opportunity to learn how to share family responsibilities, build confidence, and earn trust.

In generaly, Arab American families expect sons to protect their sisters and work like their fathers. Daughters are expected to perform housework (Vang, 2010). Children are taught from the very beginning that they have specific roles based on their gender. This may affect learning in that certain lessons are dismissed as being not necessary for one gender or the other.

Arab/Arab American children have also been observed to develop close bonds with their mothers, probably because they spend more time with them. Children have been found to act more openly with their mothers and use them to communicate with their fathers (Abudabbeh, 1996). This behavior may affect their learning in that they are more likely to engage in learning activities with their mothers instead of their fathers.

The current literature reveals how parenting styles, the relationship between parents and children, the family structure, and the physical, emotional and social concept of home all play a role in affecting the child’s life learning and developing. As such, the home is a separate observable culture. Some researchers identify this separate observable home culture as a key influencing factor on children’s development.
While many researchers have focused on the importance of the home environment in general in preparing children for the next step in their life, which is usually school, other researchers give particular attention to examining the early home experiences of a sub-population. Researchers of these studies have examined the effects of different home cultures on a child’s learning and development. I next describe some of these studies.

**Early Home Experiences of Children with Various Home Backgrounds**

Studies of children’s home backgrounds show that children can learn academic and social skills from their parents and siblings, who serve as early resources. For example, a study by Perez-Granados and Callanan (1997) examined the ways in which both parents and older siblings are important resources for young children’s learning in the home context. In this study, fifty parents of Mexican descent were interviewed in their homes and were asked questions regarding the kinds of causal questions their children ask, and the different skills their children learn from one another. Results from this study showed that children were asked questions about complex phenomena in important domains such as biology, physics, and behavior; and that parents generally accepted and encouraged these questions. Children also learned different skills from one another; younger siblings learned mostly academic skills from older siblings, and older siblings learned mostly social skills from younger siblings. Both older and younger children reported that they learned social and academic skills from one another through observation and imitation of one another.

Xu has more specifically examined the academic skills children acquire at home was (1999). This study described the home literacy experiences of six Chinese American kindergarten-aged children beginning to learn English in school. Four of the children
were U. S. born. The children’s experiences were based on how literate the parents were, and how the children learned both languages. Xu interviewed the parents and observed them in literacy activities with their children. The results indicated that the diversity and cultural nature of the children’s home literacy experience along with the supportiveness of the parents greatly influenced the child’s performance in school.

Similarly, a study by Ward (1971) examined the home language environment of Black children from lower socio-economic home environments. Ward found that in raising their children, the parents he studied relied on axioms such as “children should be seen and not heard” rather than instructional books or articles. Preschool children were not included in adult conversations and adults did not attempt to engage young children in “polite” conversation. Additionally, parents did not provide educational toys, did not directly instruct their children in language, and did not correct their children’s speech. Additionally, parents would dote on children between ages 0-3, but children aged 3 to 5 were largely ignored. Conversations between parents and school-aged children focused on what the child did or had to do rather than how the child felt.

Another study focusing on literacy examined the relationship among characteristics of Latino children’s home environments and two readiness skills: their oral and social functioning (Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006). Results showed that the relationship between parents’ literacy involvement and children’s scores and social functioning was determined by children’s interest in literacy. Children’s interest in literacy-related activities was measured by the home environment and the fostering of fundamental skills. In addition, mothers’ perceived parenting stress was directly
associated with children’s scores and social functioning (Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006).

Reyes (2006) examined how children bilingual in Spanish and English developed literacy. The goal was to build on the work about “emergent literacy” done by Teale and Sulzby (1986), which had involved only monolingual children. Reyer was able to show how bilingual children develop literacy skills through different activities in their two languages both at home and in pre-school. At home, the children participated in literacy activities in Spanish. At school, the children used English. These findings suggest that specific contexts are important and that children learn at very young ages to adjust their behavior to the norms of particular contexts.

Johnson, Breckenridge and McGowen (1984) studied a sample of Mexican American children at 12, 24, and 36 months old. Results from this study show that home environment, and more specifically the role of mothers influence children’s cognitive and language skills. Educated mothers were more aware of the types of toys that could provide educational benefits. Moreover, mothers with higher vocabulary levels made a greater effort to stimulate their child’s brains, providing different toys and games and engaging more often with their children. In general, the study found early home experiences to influence a child’s development up to one year of age.

Similarly, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) studied home socialization and parent-child interactions regarding school related activities in six Mexican American families from a small town in California and collected data about the physical resources in homes, as well as the mood of the homes and the relationships among family members. Through observations, interviews, field notes, and video and audiotape, the Delgado-Gaitan
determined that parents frequently talked face-to-face with their children about dreams, motivations, and physical resources. The parents, regardless of their financial means, made a conscientious effort to provide their children with physical resources that supported learning at home. The parents exerted control over completing schoolwork and going to bed. The parents’ knowledge about school informed their level of support for their children, and they motivated their children by sharing personal experiences and their own lack of education in Mexico (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

In all of these studies, researchers have looked at some aspect of the early home experience. The researchers primarily focused on literacy and language experiences, and the effect of being raised in a bilingual environment. Some also broadened their studies to look at how cognitive and social developments were influenced by early home environments. Other researchers go further to examine the impact of early home learning experiences on children learning and developing outside the immediate home.

Although there are many studies addressing children’s early home experiences in sub-populations, studies addressing children’s early home experiences in the case of the Arab American sub-population are scarce. The following describes the few related studies that do exist.

**Early Childhood Experiences of Arab American Children**

Through extensive searching of the related literature, I located just two studies that focused on Arab American children. These studies addressed ethnic identity and how child rearing affected the process of assimilation.

A study by Alldredge (1984) investigated the child–rearing practices of 41 Arab immigrant women living in an ethnic neighborhood in Dearborn, Michigan. The
researcher observed and interviewed the women to characterize how they raised their children and identify ethnic patterns, thereby determining what influences, if any, the American culture had on their behaviors. The results of the study showed that while immigrant Arab mothers remained traditional in most ways, some changes were occurring. The changes were most notable in independence training, types of rewards, and aggression. Minor changes occurred in emotional independence training, types of punishment, and sex roles. Alldredge attributed the changes to exposure to mass media in the U. S. and interaction with U. S. society. However, most of the mothers upheld Arab cultural values in their child-rearing, teaching their children absolute obedience, dependency, and respect for authority.

Ajrouch (1999) also researched family and ethnic identity of Arab Americans. Ajrouch studied Arab American middle school children in Dearborn, Michigan. He observed their daily activities and held two focus group discussions with the parents. Results from this study showed that parents taught their children to adopt an identity centered on gender and religion. He observed that gender and religion are at the forefront of Arab identity. The middle school children were asked to describe what it meant to be Arab American and what it meant to be American. Both were defined almost exclusively by how females behave. Parents described Arab identity based on religion and used it to justify how they raise their children. For example, according to their religion, consuming alcohol and dating are prohibited. Therefore, parents prohibited these behaviors in their children. Neither study emphasized the early home learning experience for Arab American children. Nor did either study answer such questions as:

- What types of learning do children experience at home before entering schools?
What types of materials/objects do parents provide for their children to enhance their learning experiences?

In what ways do parents engage with their children’s learning experiences? Specifically, what are the activities/practices (e.g., reading, praying or playing with the child) in which parents engage?

How do parents describe their role in preparing their children for school?

These are the kind of questions this study addresses. While the studies discussed here are the only two studies focusing exclusively on aspects of the Arab American home culture, other researchers do mention examples of Arab American children learning experiences at home.

For example, Kayyali (2006) mentioned that Arab American children learn about language and literacy through interactions with their parents and other relatives. Aside from every day conversation, parents play a role in literacy learning in other ways. Some may hire private tutors to teach their children Arabic language. Some may send their children to a mosque or church that offers Arabic language classes. The internet also provides opportunities for children to communicate in Arabic through email and video chatting. Recent Arab Americans have emigrated from former French colonies and may speak French as well as Arabic and English (Allied Media Corp., 2009). It is because of these multi-cultural interactions that many Arab American children can speak more than one language (Vang, 2010).

In addition to learning about language and literacy, Arab Americans learn about the family rules and values at home as well. A book by Abraham and Shryock (2000) features the memoirs and poems of twenty-five Arab Americans living in Detroit, and
gives first-hand accounts of the role of their early home experiences. They mentioned that early home experiences will likely dictate how a child will think and what he will value throughout his life. One Arab American student mentioned one example of the challenges he faced while he was trying to understand the American way of life:

“I remember when my American friends laughed at me because I worked, without being paid, about forty hours a week after school and on the weekends to help my father establish his business. They told me that I should quit working for my father and get a job somewhere else where I could make money for myself. What they didn’t understand was that in the Chaldean culture whatever benefits the family as a whole comes first.” (Abraham & Shryock, 2000, p. XX).

These values of the family above one’s own interests were likely established before the student even started school, during his early home development. In Arabic culture, generosity and hospitality are highly valued, as are respect for parents and the elderly. This means that children might acquire or practice these values early at home (Hassoun, 2005).

Another example from a study by Alldredge (1984) shows that from a very early age, Arab American children are taught to adopt their parents’ values as a way to show respect for the authority of all elder relatives in addition to parents. Additionally, Vang (2010) mentioned that Arab American parents teach their children to follow family traditions and gender roles, and Arab and Arab American parents create a set of rules that they expect children to learn and follow absolutely. Similarly, in all the studies conducted by Dwairy (1997, 1998, 2002) results showed that parents considered children’s
obedience to rules and social norms (e.g., to respect and obey parents and elders) as paramount and held this as a central educational value.

Along with the children’s learning about family rules, social norms, and gender roles, Arab American children also learn to honor traditions and religious practices. For example, Alsheikh et. al. (2010) and Abu-Laban (1989) mentioned that Islamic religion greatly values a social hierarchy; therefore, children must respect authority and have an awareness of the social hierarchy.

In sum, Arab American children, following the demands of their family’s culture, are expected to be absolutely obedient. They must respect elders, honor traditions, adopt their parents’ religion, and maintain the social hierarchy.

To better understand the home environment and home learning experiences of Arab American children and to provide context for their home culture, I next provide a brief description about Arab American lives and history, and in particular the lives of the Arab American families living in Toledo, where the participants in this study reside.

**Arab Americans in General**

**Who are the Arab Americans?**

As this study focuses on the early home experiences of children in Arab American families, it is necessary to define what groups of people fit the definition of “Arab American.” The term “Arab” alone describes a multi-cultural, -racial, and -ethnic population (Abudabbeh, 1996). An “Arab American” denotes an Arab who is an immigrant or descendant of immigrants from the Arab world who is now a citizen of the United States.
An Arab can be Muslim, Christian, Jew, or of some other religious tradition. Although most Arab Americans are generally categorized as Caucasian, ethnic and racial diversity are two prominent features of this unique group. For example, Arab Americans can be black, interracial, or white. Also, not everyone who comes from Arab countries is an Arab. People can originate from Kildanis, Kurds, Druze, Berbers, and others (Manning & Baruth, 2004). In addition, a wide variation in skin, hair, and eye color exists. There is no “typical-looking” Arab (Suleiman, 2001).

The Arab American population shares the culture values of the Arab world in a general sense, but not all Arab Americans who are from different ethnic groups necessarily have the same sets of cultural values. This is because Arab Americans are quite diverse. They come from different backgrounds. The same values can take different forms according to the groups’ needs and daily practices. Additionally, Arab and Arab Americans are both groups under the umbrella of Eastern culture. Eastern culture values family ties, honor, group orientation, community respect of elders and hierarchy, patriarchy, following orders, emulation, imitation, and compliance or submission (Vicente & Associates, 1990). However, “these general characteristics of Eastern culture many not be characteristic of a specific Arab American population. The different ethnic groups many have different sets of cultural values, and the same values can take different forms in accordance with a group’s needs and everyday practices” (Vang, 2010, p. 150).

**Arab Americans in the U. S.**

Arab Americans value the interconnectedness of their families and therefore try to maintain it while living in the United States. Arab Americans tend live in certain neighborhoods or communities where they can be close to others of their country or city
of origin. Moreover, they include other Arabs outside their own family or neighborhood. This makes it easier to maintain traditions because the people around them understand their customs (Kayyali, 2006).

Even though Arab Americans live in close proximity to one another as a way to keep traditions intact, changes still occur. Each individual’s economic, political, and social situations may have changed since arriving in the United States. These shifts may influence how an individual makes life choices and how an individual behaves. A majority of Arab Americans has changed their cultural traditions and outlook to some degree because of these influences (Kayyali, 2006).

Arab culture values education highly. First generation Arab Americans have different educational needs than later generations because they have limited English proficiency. A wave of new immigrants will put a greater demand on education systems that help children with limited English proficiency. Meanwhile, the subsequent generations of Arab Americans benefit from better education (Hassoun, 2005).

**Who Counts as Arab American?**

Arab-Americans are one of the dozens of minorities who have immigrated to the United States. The director of Michigan Center for Society and Economy defines Arab American as any American resident who comes from the Arabic-speaking world (Monaghan, 2003). Suleiman (1999) also defines Arab American as a term referring to the immigrants to North American from the Arabic speaking countries of the Middle East and their descendants. The Arabic-speaking countries today include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, PRE- 1948 Palestine and Palestinians, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab
Emirates, and Yemen. Somalia and Djibouti are also members of the League of Arab States and have some Arabic-speaking populations.

However, as Abudabeh (1996) observes, “Arab” seems to be based solely on a person’s language and is not an ethnic origin, because Arabs are so diverse (p. 334). Arab-Americans are distinctive in that they come from one of 22 different countries, which have differing cultural systems. As mentioned earlier, they are not united by the same religion, as Arabs may be Christian, Muslim, or Jewish. Nor are they necessarily united by language, as Arabic widely diverges according to country or region (AL-Khatab, 1999). Because Arab Americans come from different countries, they also “vary somewhat in their cultures and traditions” (El-Badry, 1994). Therefore, one who refers to himself as Arab American can actually be very different from another who refers to himself by the same term.

As discussed before, identifying an Arab by the fact that he or she speaks Arabic also poses a problem because later generations of Arab descent who are living in the United States may not speak Arabic like their parents or grandparents do. Additionally, because the term Arab is so strongly associated with Islam, some Christian Arabs prefer not to refer to themselves by that term. Ultimately, a person may identify as Arab because he or she can trace his or her ancestry back to an Arabic-speaking country (Kayyali, 2006).

On the other hand, Daoud (1989) argues that the term “Arab American” should mean a blending of being both an Arab and an American. However, many Arab Americans reject the idea of blending and state that they are either American or Arab and that the two are mutually exclusive.
Akl observes that Arab is not synonymous with “Middle Eastern.” If Arab were to encompass anything “Middle Eastern” then non-Arabs such as Iranians, Pakistanis, Jews, Turks, and even some South Asian nationalities would be included. Instead, Arabs usually identify themselves by the fact that they speak the Arabic language (even given the various dialects of Arabic), or belong to a nationality or ethnic group or political organization. Arab is so broad as to include any religious sect or any nationality. The purpose of pointing out all of these divergences is to show how the differences make it difficult categorize the group as “Arab” without at least acknowledging the numerous distinctions within the group (Akl, 2010).

Because of these distinctions many Arabs and Arab Americans do not categorize themselves as “Caucasian” on paperwork (Akl, 2010). There is no alternative category because Arab Americans are not an official minority; therefore, the U. S. Census has dramatically under-reported the group. In effect, there is no way to know how many people in the U. S. are of Arab descent (Hassoun, 2005).

The Origins of Arab Americans

The origins of Arab Americans are complex. As with other racial groups in America, Arab Americans have differences in religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, culture, and family values. Arab Americans came to the United States from one of 22 Arab countries that include Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Bissau, and Gambia (Manning & Baruth, 2009).
The majority of Arab Americans originate from a wave of immigration from Syria and Lebanon to the United States that occurred from 1890 to 1940 (Adeeb & Smith, 1995). Ninety percent of this first wave immigration population was Christian. They were farmers and merchants and assimilated in the United States with relative ease (Manning & Baruth, 2004). Others came from post World War II Arab states and were predominantly Muslim (Adeeb & Smith, 1995). Unlike the first group, these immigrants came with college degrees or were seeking to earn degrees. Furthermore, they came from all countries in the Arab world, not just Syria or Lebanon (Manning & Baruth, 2004). There is also a group of immigrants that have come as a result of the Palestinian Israeli wars (Adeeb & Smith, 1995).

Arab Americans have settled throughout the United States, but are most concentrated in big cities in California, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Texas. They are considered one of the fastest growing groups of immigrants. Michigan has one of the largest Arab American communities, with over 250,000 in the Detroit-Dearborn area alone. Also, New York and California have the largest and the most visible Arab American populations in the United States (Wertsman, 2001). Currently, it is estimated that there are 3 million Arab Americans in the United States (Manning & Baruth, 2004).

**Gender roles.** Gender roles for Arab American children might differ, and many factors aside from culture might determine gender roles. These factors include country of origin, how long the family has been in the United States, and the family rules and values. All these factors can influence the roles for boys and girls.
Gender and age are significant in the family circle. Each member has a defined family role with distinct responsibilities. For example, the father is usually the head of the household and he provides for the family’s needs, and the mother has the primary responsibility in raising the children, taking care of the house, and managing the family’s everyday functioning. Sons and daughters are taught to follow their family traditions and gender roles. Sons are expected to be the protector of their sisters and brothers and assume the masculine role of helping their fathers with all familial duties inside and outside the family circle as much as possible. On the other hand, daughters are taught to be supportive and helpful, assisting their mothers with household chores and responsibilities (Vang, 2010).

Abu-Ali and Reisen (1999) stated that defined gender roles in Arab cultures may cause problems in the United States. For example, a Muslim girl living in the United States is living in a sub-culture that is very different from that of her host culture. She is exposed to conflicting ideas from her religion and home culture and that of her host culture, which can affect her development and her identification with her gender and her role.

*Family.* Modern day Arab American families are slightly larger than those of whites or blacks, but still smaller than families in Arab countries. In Arab countries, large families are highly valued because they can make a greater economic contribution to the community. However, in America, large families are viewed as an economic burden. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, of the 1.2 million Arab Americans in the U. S., about 32,000 families were living below the poverty level (Vang, 2010).
Although generalizations can be difficult, particularly with Arabs given the diverse backgrounds and myriad countries from which they originate, some broad themes can be identified. Generally, Arab Americans have a very strong commitment to their immediate and extended families. They have a collective or communal nature. They exhibit a strong allegiance to their native language (Manning & Baruth, 2004).

Arab Americans are known for their generosity, hospitality, courage, and respect toward elders. They view education as a social benefit, religious duty, and means of survival. Therefore, Arab parents are more willing to finance the education of their children (Suleiman, 2001).

Arab Americans maintain close ties with their extended family. Siblings and cousins are generally very strong, close knit relationships. Older brothers act as chaperones to younger sisters or female cousins while older sisters act as motherly role models. Sons are generally given more freedom and more playtime, whereas daughters are more likely to be given household chores. As teenagers, daughters are more highly scrutinized and may be prohibited from dating while sons are permitted to have non-Arab girlfriends (Kayyali, 2006). Additionally younger generations exhibit solidarity and familial loyalty by caring for elderly parents.

**Religion.** No unifying religion exists in the Arab culture. Arabs practice Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Druze, and many other faiths. Though Arabs are most readily assumed to be Muslims, the majority of Arabs Americans in the United States are Christian. In fact, Arabs are a minority in the U. S. Muslim community (Suleiman, 2001). About 70 percent of Arab Americans are Christian and about 30 percent are of an Islamic faith (Manning & Baruth, 2009).
According to Charlie Allen, intelligence chief with the U. S. Department of Homeland Security, most Muslims living in America regard themselves as Americans and are the most affluent and politically engaged Muslim community in the Western world. Arab American Muslims make up the most diverse Muslim community, coming from different Arab countries for education or as war refugees. The children of these immigrants, between ages 18 and 29, comprise nearly half of American Muslims (Miller, 2007).

**Language.** As is the case with religion, Arabs are not united by a common language. Dialects of Arabic differ greatly according to country or region (AL- Khatab, 1999). The spoken Arabic can vary so much that some people regard them as separate languages, even though they share the same written form (e.g. Egyptian Arabic and Lebanese Arabic) (Kayyali, 2006).

Arabic is the sixth most commonly spoken language in the world; nearly 200 million native speakers and 235 million people worldwide speak it. According to the 2000 U. S. Census, about 615,000 Americans speak Arabic and Arabic is just the 7th most common foreign language of school aged children (Kayyali, 2006).

Most Arab Americans are multicultural and multilingual (Vang, 2010). Some Arab Americans also know French from the colonization of their native home countries by the French. Some Arab Americans only know English. This is likely because many Arab American families have been established in the United States for several generations and speaking Arabic is less of a necessity (Allied Media Corp., 2009).

Like other immigrant groups, the first generation Arab American speaks fluent Arabic and has learned English as a second language. They live in Arab communities
within the United States and continue to speak Arabic at home and in their neighborhood. English is used only to transact business. However, subsequent generations predominantly speak English, and they have to take extra language classes to be fluent in Arabic. The proliferation of the internet has allowed Arab Americans to stay more readily connected to the Arabic language. Arabic newspapers are available online and family members can communicate in Arabic via email (Kyyalli, 2006).

**Arab Americans in Toledo**

I am indebted throughout this section to the work of Samir Abu-Absi, Professor Emeritus at the University of Toledo, who has written a history about the Arab American community in the Toledo area (Abu-Absi, 2010). From this text, I have learned that Arab Americans living in Toledo, Ohio have come from different Arab countries and different American states at differing times. The immigrants came seeking better economic opportunity, to escape religious persecution, and to avoid military drafts.

Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, mostly Christian men, arrived between 1881 and 1914. They were divided between Maronite and Melkite sects of the Eastern Rite Catholic Church and Greek Orthodox church. A second wave arrived after the world wars until 1960, bringing more Christian women and children, as well as Muslims. In 1920, there were 720 Syrians in Toledo. By 1930, the number had doubled, as more immigrants arrived. After the war, the number of Christian Arab immigrants declined, as most had already arrived prior to the war. Meanwhile, the number of Muslim Arab immigrants increased.
The Muslim Arab American population continued to grow and move into middle class neighborhoods. In 1983, the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo was established in the Toledo suburb of Perrysburg (Awada, 2010).

According to a study by Semaan, Arab Americans in Toledo have integrated and assimilated with the highest frequency, with no marginalization. Arab Americans are an integral part of the Toledo community, having established businesses and entered professional careers. Seventy-eight percent are college educated and eighty percent are proficient English speakers. They have not experienced any resistance from the rest of the Toledo community and thus have flourished (Semaan, 2007).

**Summary**

Little is known about the early home learning experiences for Arab American children and the picture remains poorly understood. The extant literature was generalized. In general, researchers agreed that early home experience play an important role in the child’s life but they differ in how these experiences affect or contribute to childhood development.

Researchers studied home environments in different ways. Some studies focused on how home environment affects the child’s learning and developing in the general population. Others researched the impact of home environment in subcultures, investigating how some cultures affect or shape the child’s learning and behaviors. What is clear from reviewing these studies – in the general population and in subcultures – is that researchers agreed that the early home experiences are important for the child to learn and grow, both in school and beyond.
The existing research in Arab American children focused on ethnic identity and child-rearing practices in the process of assimilation without showing the children’s overall learning experiences at home. The only contributions of researchers in the case of Arab American children’s early learning experiences concerned some types of experiences these children might learn at home, such as learning about family values (e.g., respecting elders parents and following homes’ rules) or learning about their language or religious traditions.

More frequently, studies conducted in home from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds focused more on literacy and language issues. Some also focused on finding a relationship between the home culture and the child’s social, cognitive, and academic performance in school. In all these studies, researchers predominantly examined how home culture can affect the children literacy and language, and more specifically how parents can affect these learning experiences. Some researchers went further to examine how children develop literacy and knowledge in two languages.

In general, research varied in how it looked at home culture and what it regarded as influential to a child’s learning and developing. Some research described how young children learn academic and social skills by interacting with parents and siblings. Other research investigated how parenting styles can affect a child’s academic, social and cognitive development. Still other studies looked at how the family structure and child-parent time affects academic achievement.

Some researchers focused on the significance of the parents’ role in child development. More specifically, researchers (Bandura, 1969; Baumrind, 1973; Campbell, 1995; Lamb, Patterson, Capaldi, & Bank, 1992; NICHD, Early Child Care Research
Network, 1999; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985) mentioned that parents’ roles might affect the children negatively or positively. Parents were often found to have affected it positively by helping the child to adapt socially or to enhance their literacy skills. Parents were found to affect it negatively when the negative family interactions provided reinforcement for aggression.

Looking at the relationship of culture and learning from a historical standpoint, it seems that the goals of society dictated the approach to education. What the child learned at home was the same as what society needed the child to learn (Marrou, 1982). What the child learns in an Arab American home will likely differ from what an American child learns at home, even though they both live in the same country. This is because they have differing home cultures. Sub-cultures that have different cultural values, beliefs, and behavior codes may be incongruous to the values, beliefs, and behavior codes in American schools. Therefore, what the child learns at home may be different from what is expected at school. This, in turn, could affect how the child learns and how well the child is prepared to adapt and be successful in school.

Solving the problem does not mean diverse sub-cultures must change their value system to fit their host culture. This method would degrade the value of a diverse society. Nor does it mean the host culture, in this case the American school system, must change its educational system. There are too many sub-cultures to practically and successfully cater to each one, and what would be ideal for one sub-culture may be to the detriment of another (Nieto, 1996). However, it might be appropriate for these sub-cultures to make minor changes in the way they prepare, or teach their children to fit into the host culture.
Ideally the home culture would prepare the child for the demands of a diverse host
culture without reducing the importance of the home culture.

As the historical and contemporary contexts demonstrate, the idea of how culture
impacts learning is not new. What might be new is how researchers examine each home
culture in different ways to show how each culture affects a child’s learning experience,
whether at home, in school, or within the larger community. When looking at children
from different home cultures, researchers should consider the value system (e.g. family
structure, learning styles, and parenting styles) of each home culture, as this is what first
establishes children’s learning and developing in life as a whole.
Chapter Three

Methods

The descriptive multiple case study design aimed to describe Arab American children’s early learning experiences and the context in which these experiences occur. Six Arab American families were selected to participate in this study based on protocol explained below. Data sources included interviews and oral surveys with parents. The focal groups in this study are children and parents. Considerations such as gender, prior linguistic experiences, and the moving history of the child were taken into account when interpreting the results of the study.

This chapter provides a description of the rational for the study’s design as well as details about the research design and process including information about the participants and the procedures used to collect, organize, and analyze the data.

Rational for Using Case Study Design

The case study design provides the opportunity to gain in-depth understanding of the context of a subject by allowing the researcher to observe individuals in their natural setting (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The setting in this study is the Arab American home. The goal of studying within the Arab American home is to understand children’s early learning experiences in the home. The case study design was beneficial because it helped me enter these homes and closely observe the nature of these homes. In addition I was able to ask parents directly about their children’s learning experiences.

For example, a method, like large-scale surveying by mail, would not provide the opportunity for meaningful contact with the parents and their children. I would have been unable to ask clarifying questions. I would have been unable to observe the physical
environment and determine what resources and materials were available. Materials I could have listed on a survey may not have encompassed all of the items that parents have in their homes to aid their child’s learning. Moreover, collecting a paper and pencil self-report survey would not have allowed me to capture more details that the parents would provide but that I might not have thought of when designing a survey. A survey would also not have let me see sample work from the children. Because of the need to gather information beyond what a standard question and answer form can provide, a case study method was superior to a survey method.

Additionally, Creswell stated that “often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue” (2007, p. 74). My goal has been to describe each case separately in close detail, and then to seek patterns across the cases in terms of how children’s learning is enhanced. I have sought to identify common themes that may apply to more Arab American families (Creswell, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

Although the case study design is advantageous in that it allows the researcher to obtain more detailed information through interviews, observations, and the collection of artifacts, the method also has limitations. The most common criticism is that it may be difficult to transfer findings from one case to another. Moreover, it is sometimes viewed as more subjective than other research methods because it relies on the researcher’s observations, which may be influenced by what the researcher knows, or expects to discover. Also, the pertinent findings can be lost under too many descriptive details (Neale, Thapa, & Boyce, 2006).
With these limitations in mind, I have taken several measures to ensure the disadvantages of the case study method do not encroach upon the validity of the research. I collected the same type of information from several different sources. I used peer and member checking to ensure the validity and reliability of my observations. I also codified the data according to broad themes and based my narrative on these themes.

While no study method is without its limitations, the case study method was optimal for my research questions. There was no better way to gain information about the six Arab American families than by observing them first-hand in their own homes. I was able to ask follow up questions, note non-verbal cues, and examine the make-up of the home environment.

**My Role as the Researcher**

Conducting qualitative research requires the researcher to establish rapport with the subjects, manage subjectivity, and honor ethics and reciprocity. Establishing trust with the Arab American families was important because it enabled me to gain more information and details from them about how the parents raise their young children. My own Arab background and fluency in an easily understandable Jordanian dialect of Arabic set my subjects at ease. They were more comfortable to be open in answering my interview questions and cooperating with me. Nevertheless, I took great care not to make assumptions of their circumstances based on my own experiences or expectations.

**Gaining rapport.** Spradley stated that rapport does not necessarily mean deep friendship or profound intimacy between two people (1979). Just as respect can develop between two people who do not particularly like one another, rapport can exist in the absence of fondness and affection. This idea is key to the success of my study, because I
had time constraints. I did not have the time necessary to build deep friendships in order to earn the participants’ trust. Rather, I accomplished earning trust quickly through establishing rapport.

I took several steps to establish rapport with the Arab American families. First, I behaved as a grateful guest in their home, not as an authority with superior status. Second, I was polite and cordial with all of the family members that I met so that they would continue to welcome me into their homes. Third, I listened intently to all of their answers and asked follow up questions to not only gain further insight, but to show them that I thought what they said was important and interesting. Fourth, I was open and honest about the research I was conducting and gave the parents the choice of whether to participate. By taking these steps, I feel that the families were more willing to provide greater details because they accepted me as a trustworthy person.

I know I built good rapport with the parents I interviewed based on the answers they gave in their interviews. Even questions that required them to say yes or no, they expanded upon. They gave descriptive details, which indicated to me that they were cooperating. Spradley (1979) asserted that rapport encourages informants to talk about their culture, and this is exactly what I experienced while conducting the interviews. I established rapport and the parents were enthusiastic to share their practices and opinions with me.

Subjectivity. As Glesne (2006) mentioned, a person can know how biased or how subjective he is after conducting interviews and making observations. This makes me recall my own experience with subjectivity. When I did the interviews and observations, I considered myself mostly objective because I did what was assigned and I only recorded
what I observed or heard without consciously adding or deleting anything. I was aware of the impact my beliefs and likes or dislikes could have, so to combat subjectivity, I documented exactly what I saw and heard.

**Ethics and reciprocity.** Both ethics and reciprocity are important factors for researchers to know and to take into consideration when conducting research. House (1990) emphasized the importance of informing the participant about what the study is about so that the participant cannot be manipulated. For instance, before I began interviews with the parents, I explained what the study was about. I made sure they understood that they could stop the interview at any time and they did not have to give a reason why they wanted to stop. I also gave them the choice of conducting the interview in Arabic or English, so that they would not feel pressured to speak in one language over another.

Furthermore, one of the ethical principles that the researcher should take into consideration when conducting research with adults is to let them know what the risks are and what their role should be. If there are some risks, the researcher should inform the participant and give him the choice of whether to participate. The researcher must have the participant sign a consent form as an ethical consideration (House, 1990). I honored these ethical principles by collecting signed consent forms from all of the parents I interviewed.
Participants

Case Study Families

The primary participants in this study were parents from Arab American families who live in the Northwest Ohio region of the United States. Pseudonyms were assigned to the six families: Al-Kateeb, Jaara, Hadad, Kayalli, Awad, and Habib.

As discussed in chapter 2, defining who Arabs and Arab American are is problematic. For the purpose of this study, I consistently used specific criteria. I sought only families who intended to permanently live in the U. S. and pursue citizenship regardless of the current status of that process. Additionally, at least one parent had to be a native speaker of Arabic. Also the participants themselves agreed with being described as “Arab American.” Additionally, there had to be in each family at least one child who was 5 years old because this is the age before children formally enter school. Participant families were chosen from two schools located in the Toledo area where most students are from Arab American households.

Recruitment Procedures. Six Arab American families were recruited through school records. Principals at two schools agreed to provide contact information for potential participants. I attended “Open House” events at the schools before the school year ended and explained the project and informed consent materials at the Open House events.

I called the parents and they gave their initial agreement to participate. I scheduled an informal meeting with parents to explain the Human Subjects Informed Consent form and to conduct the interviews.
**Procedures for case-study families.** The participating six families were asked to allow me to visit their homes for a series of 3 to 5 semi-structured interviews, each lasting 30-40 minutes. At the initial interview, which was slightly longer than the subsequent interviews, I asked the family a series of questions about their thinking and beliefs about education for their kindergarten child and about aspects of the learning environment they create at home. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription. I orally administered a paper and pencil survey during the initial interview. The administration of this survey was also audio-taped. Field notes were taken immediately after each interview. Follow-up interviews allowed me to clarify and ask for additional details about answers from the initial interview. At most, parents were interviewed for approximately 3 hours.

As is common in a qualitative research design, member-checking, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was employed as I checked back with the subjects to ensure that my descriptions were true to the subjects. The families were asked to review initial descriptions of each family’s home learning environment before progressing to the interpretive phase of the research. Member-checking occurred during interviews after the initial one.

Participating parents were asked to provide me with several of their child’s written artifacts (e.g. drawings, writing). I photographed and photocopied the child’s written artifacts and returned the originals to the families.

**Rationale for purposeful sampling, versus random, recruitment of case study families**

I incorporated Creswell’s advice in how to choose the sample of the study. He stated that “the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case.
When a researcher chooses multiple cases, the issue becomes, ‘How many cases?’ There is not a set number of cases. Typically, however, the researcher chooses no more than four or five cases” (Creswell, 2007, p. 76). I chose six cases of Arab American families, deciding that even if one or two families did not follow through with participation in my study, I would remain among Creswell’s recommended number.

Parents who agreed to participate in this study from these two schools were categorized into two groups. The first group consisted of families who have been in the United States less than 10 years and the second group consisted of families who have been in the United States for more than 10 years. From each group, the first three families who agreed to participate were chosen after initial telephone calls to the parents. Hill and Hayes (2003) and ICPSR (2009) categorized recent immigrants as those who have been in the United States for less than 10 years and non-recent immigrants as those who have been here longer.

There are several reasons for this approach. First, it is not reasonable to choose six families randomly from these families in these two schools to be representative for all Arab American families. If 6 families are randomly chosen and it turns out that most of these families have been in the U. S. for a long period of time, it would mean that these families have had more time to assimilate, and the children may have more easily adapted to American schools. Parents have had more time to become knowledgeable about the American school system and might therefore have a more fully developed understanding about how parents must prepare their children to enter school. Parents might be more familiar with the types of materials and objects that the children will encounter in school, and can introduce these items early on at home.
In contrast, if 6 families are randomly chosen and it is discovered that most of them are from families who have been in the U. S. for a short period of time it may be assumed that the children’s experiences and the type of support parents provide could differ from those of Arab American families who have been here for a long period of time. Additionally, it may be that children in families who have more recently immigrated are not as well prepared as the children who have been living in the U. S. for a longer period of time simply because parents are not aware of the materials that are available. If parents are not familiar with what the American education system expects from their children, they may not teach their children the appropriate behaviors and practices to prepare their children to adapt to school.

To have the possibility of examining some of these issues, families were chosen in a purposeful manner to include three recent immigrant families who have been in the U. S. less than 10 years, and three families who have been in the U. S. for more than 10 years. Studying Arab American families in terms of how long they have been in the U. S. will avoid the possibility of a lopsided sample that has only families who have been in the U. S. for a long period of time or families who just immigrated to the U. S. By taking into consideration how long the families have been living in the U. S., the study also can investigate whether the length of stay has directly or indirectly affected the children’s early home experiences. Choosing the sample this way enabled me to analyze and interpret the data in terms of the length of time families spend in the U. S.

Additionally, choosing the samples based on the amount of time lived in the U. S. may help teachers and educators know which children need more help than others. Is it the children from recent immigrant families, or children from families who have been
living in the U. S. for a long period of time? Why? It can provide a stronger logical argument as to why these learning experiences differ or are the same in different homes’ cultures. It may also provide a platform for drawing parallels among various other immigrant sub-cultures, such as the early home experience of recent Chinese American immigrant children versus the early home experience of Chinese American immigrant children who have lived in the U. S. for more than 10 years.

**Procedures**

This section outlines the procedures used in this study which includes the data sources and collection methods, the timeline for collection the data, the data management, and data analysis.

**Data Sources and Collection Methods**

Researchers used different methods to collect data when they examined the home learning experiences in different home cultures. They used formal and informal interviews, a questionnaire/survey, and observations. In this study, data were collected through interviews with parents, oral survey, field notes, and samples of the child-produced artifacts (written texts and drawings). These methods helped answer the research questions by providing detailed information about the children’s early home experiences. All documents were stored in a locked file cabinet and raw data was examined only by me.

*Interviews with parents.* Parents were interviewed in their homes. 3-5 visits to each family. Approximately 30-40 minutes each, over the course of 6 weeks. The total maximum interview time was about 3 hours. Digital audio-recordings of the interviews were made. Audio-files were transcribed and then destroyed. Pseudonyms were used for
all participants. Parents were approached at “Open House” events at the schools before the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Some parents took the informed consent materials home to review. Others were given the materials in their homes after initial phone contact that included an initial explanation of the project. For their convenience, parents were asked in which language(s) they preferred to be interviewed. All parents chose to be interviewed in English. The reason for choosing a face-to-face type of interviewing is because people in Arab cultures generally prefer face-to-face interactions rather than impersonal ones (Hill, Loch, Straub, & El-Sheshai, 1998). Moreover, using the interview method allowed me to collect a wide range of data in a short time. The interview method also allowed me to ask open-ended questions, listen to the participants, and gain more information about the children’s early experiences. Denzin & Lincoln, (1994) for instance, describe it as an art of asking questions and listening. With the permission of the interviewee (parents), the conversations were recorded and transcribed. Follow-up questions were asked throughout the interviews as the situation dictated. This situation was recognized by Glesne, who wrote, “questions may emerge in the course of interviewing and may add to or replace the pre-established ones; this process of question formation is the more likely and the more ideal one in qualitative inquiry” (2006, p. 79).

A tape recorder was used in the interviews. The tape recorder helped me listen repeatedly to what the parents said and to catch every single word. Glesne gives the benefits of the tape recorder by pointing out that “the tape recorder, however, provides a nearly complete record of what has been said and permits easy attention to the course of the interview” (2006, p. 89). Moreover, tape recorded messages can help in providing direct quotations from the interviewees so that the researcher can support a point or
interpret data with precise accuracy (Hakim, 1987). During the interviews with parents, I wrote notes that the tape recorder could not represent because the recorder is just a representation of the speech and does not record the movements, facial expressions, or body language of the participant (James, Frances, & Faculty of the Erickson institute, 1989). For example, some of the nods parents made during the interviews had to be recorded in my notes immediately because the recorder would not help me know later what the interviewee was communicating at that moment. For example, nodding the head up and down was interpreted as the parent agreeing and as a yes answer for a question. Turning the head from side to side was interpreted as parents disagreeing and as a no answer for a question (see Appendix A for the interview questions used with parent participants). After the first interview with parents, which took approximately 45 minutes, I listened to each interview question by question to make sure that the interviewee fully answered each question. I marked questions that needed follow-up questions for the next interview. The goal of listening to each interview before the next visit to each family was to check if there were any missing questions not asked, to gain more information, and to ask clarifying questions as a follow up to the first interview. After finishing all the interviews with parents, I transcribed the audio-files were transcribed and organized the data in separate folders on the computer. One computer file folder was designated for each family.

**Survey of parents.** I orally administered the survey of parents’ home learning activities and environment in both Arabic and English in the case-study families’ homes. The initial interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The administration of this survey was audio-taped. The purpose of using this survey was to answer the research question
about the materials or objects parents provide for their children. These short questions helped parents understand the questions and ensured that all of them answered the same questions, giving answers that could be more easily categorized and analyzed (see Appendix B). Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) highlighted these as advantages of using questionnaires in some cases.

At the end of each question, parents were asked to mention any other materials or objects that I might not have brought up. Also, parents were asked to add other ways they engage with their children to enhance their learning skills.

Some Cultural Aspects of Conducting the Interviews

During the interview with the Arab American parents, I was aware of some of the aspects of Arab/Arab American culture that facilitated my work. It allowed the parents to be more comfortable disclosing information to me about their children’s learning experiences. For example, maintaining prolonged eye contact during conversations is considered impolite. I not only know this, but I also naturally and easily adhere to this social norm because I am from this culture. Therefore, during interviews, I was not distracted by wondering whether my non-verbal cues were inadvertently insulting the parents.

Additionally, I know what information is considered sensitive or too private, such as the age of a woman. I was able to phrase my questions in ways that did not seem too direct or rude. In some cases, the information was too intrusive to ask about, such as what specific jobs the parents worked. For this reason, the parents’ employment information is not included in this study.
Cultural awareness is critical for a researcher to have to avoid offending the people being studied and causing them to not be as open or refusing to participate entirely. For example, I was invited to one family’s home to conduct an interview at a certain time. When I arrived and rang the bell, a child answered the front door and told me his father was not home, but would return in ten minutes. Because I knew that it is rude to enter a house when the father is not present, I waited in my car. When the father arrived, he never asked me why I waited in the car. For him, my behavior was normal and expected. It was how I showed that I respected him and his family.

Artifact collection

Child-produced artifacts (written texts and drawings) were requested from parents and used to examine general levels of emergent literacy for each child. The artifacts were also used to better understand the ways children were beginning to use written representations of objects and ideas.

Additionally, the artifacts allowed me to look at the children’s experiences from a different perspective and examine what children knew from skills, knowledge, the language/ languages they most used in their work. The artifacts represented the children’s thoughts, experiences, actions and ideas. They were used as an indicator of what these children have learned, what they think is important, and what they are interested in. Also, these collections were important as a means to ensure that the children’s experiences were examined in different ways and to corroborate the results of the interviews.

The following table is a summary showing how many artifacts were collected from each child
Table 1

*Number of Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Al-Kateeb</th>
<th>Jaara</th>
<th>Hadad</th>
<th>Kayali</th>
<th>Awad</th>
<th>Habib</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Field notes*

Field notes were taken during each visit and expanded later at home. During each visit, general notes were written on a notebook as short sentences or words. I expanded these notes and recorded more detailed impressions and observations immediately after each visit to avoid making the family uncomfortable. I typed my field notes on the computer and labeled them Family 1 through Family 6. Then I read and reread these notes for each family and analyzed them according to specific codes and themes. For example, the physical environment included the furniture style, materials, objects, resources for activities like exercising rooms and swimming pools.

The goal of these field notes was to add more information about Arab American homes and to understand the big picture surrounding this environment. I described how parents set up the home environment in a way to facilitate their children’s learning and assessed what materials, objects, and activities the parents made available for the children in the house. In the field notes I also observed the presence of designated child play areas or study areas.

Researchers have acknowledged the importance of field notes and have considered them a primary recording tool of any qualitative research to describe people places events activities and conversations (Glesne, 2006). Field notes are another tool for
obtaining details about a setting and help with in-depth understanding of a subject matter (Emerson, 1995).

Summary

Below is a table summarizing the research questions for this study and the data sources which are used to examine each question.

Table 2

Research Questions and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the nature of the home environments in six Arab American families with 5 year-old children in Northwest Ohio region of the United States of America?</td>
<td>Interviews (open-ended questions); questionnaire; artifact collection – sample of the children’s work (field notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. How do parents in these families describe their role in preparing their children for school?</td>
<td>Interviews (open-ended questions; questionnaire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. What types of materials/objects do parents provide for their children?</td>
<td>Interviews (open-ended questions; survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. In what ways do parents say they engage with their children?</td>
<td>Interviews (open-ended questions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Data Organization**

The data were organized in several ways. First, six manila envelopes were used to store the consent forms for parents, as well as to store the samples of the children’s written texts and drawings. Second, each family was numbered one through six and each envelope was numbered Family 1 through Family 6 accordingly. A sheet of paper attached to each envelope logged the date and time of all interactions with the family, such as the telephone calls and in home visits.

Third, a notebook with dividers for each family was used to write field notes. The first page in each section contained the address and the phone number for each family. Additionally, it contained sections entitled “Physical Environment,” with sub headings wall décor, furniture, materials, objects, games, toys, resources like TVs, computers, activities. General notes related to children, parents, language used by parents, children, grandmother, and grandfathers, and code lists were also documented.

Fourth, folders on the computer hard drive were created for each family and labeled with Family 1 through Family 6. In these folders, I saved the field notes and the transcripts of all recorded tapes made during each interview with parents.

Fifth, all data, including the computer disks, hard drive, recorder/audiotapes, notebook, and the envelopes for each family were stored in a locked cabinet.

**Data Analysis and Coding Scheme**

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis was performed in several stages. The first phase involved codifying the interview answers according to specific topics and themes to facilitate the data analysis process for each family separately.
In the second phase, I examined these codes and themes across the six families. I wrote similar codes for the six families and added different codes.

In the third phase, I identified new codes, themes or patterns by re-reading the interview transcriptions and field notes. This also helped me later in interpreting the data as Glesne (2006) and Yin (2003) have suggested.

In the fourth phase, after organizing, classifying, and finding themes in the data, I made connections that ultimately have meaning for the reader (Stake, 1995). With help from peer checking with Dr. Samir Abu-Absi, I identified six general themes based on the parents’ answers. I also heeded the advice of Yin (2003) and analyzed the data with an engaging narrative.


Another important step in analyzing the data was to analyze the children’s artifacts. As a means of triangulation, the children’s artifacts provided evidence of the children’s learning experiences and general levels of emergent literacy. The artifacts corroborated the data from the interviews and offered information from the child’s perspective. I grouped the children’s artifacts into 3 main categories: drawing, drawing with text, and text.
Additionally, I considered Purcell-Gates’ (2007) observations about coding some events as being part of more than one sociotextual domain. As she stated, “people live in complex social worlds and their literacy practices reflect this. For example, a literacy event in which a father reads the Bible to his child as part of a nightly ritual would have been coded within the sociotextual domains of parenting and religion” (p. 20). Similarly, when an Arab American parent stated that he reads the Quran to his child to teach him how to read as well as to educate him about religion, I coded this as print literacy exposure and religion. I also used the term “home literacy” as a category to refer to the reading and writing behaviors the child does at home. These gave significance to the research questions and were used as additional evidence in relation to my emerging interpretations.

Details from direct observation of the homes were also included to illustrate the types of living environments of each of the families. I introduced my interpretation with direct evidence from the research. For example, Wolcott (1994) discusses this issue as moving from organization of the data to creating meaning from the data. He discusses description, analysis, and interpretation as three means of data transformation. Accordingly, as I transformed my data through rich description of it, I drew heavily on the field notes and interview transcripts. I provided a detailed description of the parents’ answers, and incorporated direct quotes in order to share the parents’ voices with the reader. Furthermore, I gave a detailed description of the field notes (e.g., the physical environment of each home, the resources, and materials available for children to learn from), allowing the data to somewhat “speak for themselves” and to answer the question “what is going on here” in this part, as Wolcott (1994) suggests doing.
Lastly, I used grounded theory and constant comparative methods to derive the final general themes and categories. The method allowed me to move from observations to sub-coding to identifying general themes and categorizing those themes, thereby giving the data meaning and allowing me to develop an understanding of the results (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Coding Scheme**

Several steps were used to codify the parents’ answers to the interview questions as well as for the data collected during direct observations to the home environment in the six Arab American families. For example, when the parents stated that their children can read and write some letters, numbers, or words and know the alphabets in Arabic and English, I coded these under sub-category “reading, writing, know alphabets in Arabic and English.” From these sub-categories and codes, I created the category of “academic preparedness.”

Likewise, when the parents stated that they need their children to make friends, ask questions, share with siblings and other kids, participate in events in school or in the community, greet people, help others, play with other kids, work with other kids, respect people, behave, and not be shy, I codified these sub codes to be under the main category “social preparation.” In the same manner, when the parents stated that they want their young children to love parents, love teachers, love school, love of self, believe in themselves, not be afraid of meeting people or new places or environments (e.g., school), and making supplications, I codified these sub-categories under the main category “emotional preparation.” Again, when parents stated that they provide different resources, materials, and objects to their children at home and interact with them to teach
them about different things such as literacy skills, language, culture, religion, food, greeting, family rules, family values. I classified these sub-categories under the main category “the parents roles.”

Finally, when parents reported that they like their children to learn about their own culture (norms, customs, values, etc.), other cultures, and religion I codified these sub-categories under the main category “general preparation.”

When visiting each family for a serial of 3- 5 visits to interview the parents to learn about their children’s learning experiences, I had the opportunity to document and write field notes from the direct observation during each visit. For example, when observing that the home has swimming pool and room for exercising I codified this under sub-category activities, when I observed decorations on the walls such as pictures for the family, texts (e.g., versus from Quran, pictures for religious places, pictures for the nature) or furniture (sofas or mattresses, library), materials/resources (TV, computers, books), objects (games, toys, bicycles, etc.). I codified these sub-categories under the main category “physical environments.”

In the collection of the children’s artifacts, I found that some of their works are drawings, and some are writings in Arabic and in English, and some combine both drawing with text in English or Arabic. I codified these under the sub-categories drawing, drawing with text or text. The main category, artifacts (drawing and writing) was based on these sub-categories.

When the parents stated that their young children can do things by themselves and are curious to explore things by themselves, such as fixing their toys or their bikes, testing their abilities to read or write a letter or a word or a number, dressing by
themselves, starting a computer game, building with Legos, cleaning up their rooms, or organizing their stuff, I grouped these codes under the main category self learning.

To ensure reliability of the coding scheme, I have checked and shared data and scheme through peer checking with Dr. Samir Abu-Absi a scholar of the Arab American community in Toledo. He assisted me with identifying the six broad themes. I sent him all the sub-categories for the parents’ answers to the interview questions via email. We met in person a week later to discuss the sub-codes and determine how they could fit under main categories across all families. We marked similarities and differences. For each item, we debated the appropriateness of the category until all items were addressed. We agreed to put the sub-categories under six broad themes that encompassed all families and were common among all the parents’ answers. For example, the sub-categories learning about the family values, learning the family customs, learning about the religion, learning about Arabic language, learning about greeting, learning about food, and learning respect and manners we placed under the main “learning about culture” because all of these sub-categories can be considered elements of culture. We also determined that learning about Arabic language can also fit best under the main category language and literacy as well.

Additionally, I incorporated the advice of Armstrong et al. (1997) and Creswell (2007) on doing intercoder agreement on codes and themes to ensure an external check on the highly interpretive coding process. To achieve this goal, two peers (PhD students who have experience in the field of education) helped me in coding. Each peer took a copy of the all interview transcripts and independently read the transcripts and coded each. We met two times to review each transcript paragraph by paragraph and compared
our codes. We marked the similarities and differences by writing the word agree and disagree accordingly. We discussed why and how we differed until we reached an agreement on how it should be coded. I next describe the coding scheme.

### Table 3

_Coding Scheme_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic preparation</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form words with letters in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form words with letters in Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know Arabic alphabets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know English alphabets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know letters in Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know letters in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social preparation</td>
<td>Making friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing with siblings and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participating in events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(school / community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greeting people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helping others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playing with other kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with other kids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70
Respecting people
Behaving
Not being shy

Emotional preparation
Love parents
Love teachers
Love school
Love of self
Belief in self
Not afraid of meeting people
Not afraid of new places / environments
Making supplications

The parents’ roles
Teaching literacy skills
Teaching Language(s)
Teaching children about culture
Teaching children about religion
Teaching children about food
Teaching children about greeting
Teaching children about family values
Teaching children about family rules
Providing materials/ objects
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General preparation</td>
<td>Learning about Arabic norms, learning about Arabic customs, learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about Arabic values, learning about other cultures, learning about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Decorations on the walls, pictures for the family, text e.g., versus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from <em>Quran</em>, pictures for religious places, pictures for the nature,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>furniture / sofas / mattress, materials/resources, TV, computers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>Drawing, drawing with text, text (Arabic/ English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self learning</td>
<td>Fixing their toys, fixing their bikes, testing their abilities to read</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

72
Letters/words/numbers
Test their abilities to write
Letters/words/numbers
Test their abilities to spell a word
Dressing by themselves
Starting /playing a game(steps)
Building things, using Legos
Cleaning up their rooms
Organizing their stuff

Activities

Swimming
Exercising
Playing in the backyard (swing, slides/basketball
Playing with parents (e.g., flash cards/ soccer)
Playing with sibling/friends
Chapter Four

Results: Individual Cases

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth description of the six Arab American families participating in this study. First, I discuss each family separately, including information about each family’s moving history, home environment, family rules, as well as, of course, parents’ thinking about their roles in their children’s education and upbringing. Although there are many similarities among the families, for example all the families are Muslims, there are differences too, and through this case-by-case analysis I hope to allow the reader to be able to form a deeper understanding of each family.

In all the cases, although conducting the interviews in Arabic was offered to the families as an option, all of the parents opted to conduct the interviews in English. One additional thing to note is that the level of annual income each family disclosed to me ranged from $20,000 to $35,000. The official guidelines for poverty put out by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2011 indicated that for a family of four an income level of $22,350 in the 48 contiguous states would be considered eligible for many low-income services (HHS website, 2011). According to U.S. Census data (reported in 2009 dollars), incomes in the range of those of the families in this study would be in approximately the 12th to 27th percentile of incomes across all American families. Thus, the cases reported here are of lower-income Arab American homes. After these cases, I summarize these characteristics.

In addition to the pseudonyms assigned for each family, in this chapter I also assigned pseudonyms for the young children. Below are two tables that summarize the pseudonyms as well as information about the parents’ education level, the annual income
level for each family, and the predominant language(s) used at home by the parents and their children.

Table 4

*Pseudonyms and Some Key Information about Each Family*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym for the Family</th>
<th>Country/countries of Origin for Parents</th>
<th>Total Number of Children (Gender, Age)</th>
<th>Number of Years in Living in the U.S. (for Parents)</th>
<th>Pseudonym used for kindergarten-aged child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al Kateeb family</td>
<td>Both from Syria</td>
<td>3 children: M ages 12 &amp; 5; F age 8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Yazen (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaara family</td>
<td>Both from Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>3 children: M ages 9, 5 &amp; 3 months</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Sameer (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadad family</td>
<td>Father: Palestine; Mother: U.S.A.</td>
<td>6 children: M ages 14 &amp; 8; F ages 5, 16, 15 &amp; 13</td>
<td>Father: 9; Mother: 28</td>
<td>Sara (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayalli family</td>
<td>Both from Syria</td>
<td>3 children: M ages 9 &amp; 5; F age 8</td>
<td>Father: 19; Mother: 10</td>
<td>Adam (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awad family</td>
<td>Father: Jordan; Mother: U.S.A.</td>
<td>6 children: M ages 14, 9 &amp; 2; F ages 12, 10 &amp; 5</td>
<td>Father: 19; Mother: 31</td>
<td>Nora (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habib family</td>
<td>Both from Jordan</td>
<td>2 children: F ages 5 &amp; 5</td>
<td>Father: 13; Mother: 6</td>
<td>Mary and Hala</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*The Parents’ Education Level, the Combined Annual Income Level, and the Predominant Language(s) Used at Home*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Annual Income Level</th>
<th>Predominant Language(s) Used at Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Al Kateeb family | Father: Bachelors Degree  
                     Mother: 2 years college | $30k | By parents: Arabic  
                                                   By children: English |
| Jaara family   | Both have Bachelors Degree | $20k | By parents: Arabic  
                                                   By children: Arabic |
| Hadad family   | Father: 2 years college  
                     Mother: High school | $35k | By parents: English  
                                                   By children: English |
| Kayalli family | Father: High school  
                     Mother: Bachelors Degree | $22k | By parents: Arabic  
                                                   By children: Arabic |
| Awad family    | Father: High school  
                     Mother: one year college | $30k | By parents: English  
                                                   By children: English |
| Habib family   | Father: Bachelors Degree  
                     Mother: Masters Degree | $21k | By parents: Arabic  
                                                   By children: English |

**Description of Arab American Families Participating in This Study**

**The AL-Kateeb Family**

This family lives in a house with a large backyard. The house has different rooms for the girls and boys. When I visited, the children were often sitting in a big room on mattresses watching TV. This set-up is similar to the rooms in most Arab homes where mattresses are placed on the floor and family members lay on them to rest or watch television.

The family has both Arabic and American styles of furniture. In addition to the mattresses on the floor with large cushions, they also use a sofa with chairs and a coffee
The parents said that they love having both styles in their home. The Arabic style reminds them of their own childhood homes. They use the American style when they have visitors.

On the walls, there are many pictures of religious places, quoted verses from the Quran, family portraits, and pictures of nature. Most of the pictures are of family and relatives, with religious pictures second, and nature pictures third.

There are many items available for the children to play with. In the backyard there are swings, bicycles, and a swimming pool, with many toys in the swimming pool. Inside the house there are computers, televisions, books, drawing and writing tools, tables for studying, and a small library.

When I asked the parents about their moving history to the United States, the parents responded that they came directly from Syria to Toledo, Ohio. The parents stated that they tried living in Europe, and then returned to Syria, before finally settling in the United States. They stated that they wanted to come to the United States because they believed living in the US would provide them with opportunities for themselves and their children. The parents stated that they have been living in Toledo for 19 years, and they like living here and consider it their home.

Both parents in this family are educated. The father, who is 44 years old, has a Bachelor degree in computer science, and the mother, who is 33 years old, attended two years of college. The family has 3 children—2 sons ages 12 and 5, and 1 daughter who is 8 years old. All of the children were born in the United States.

When asking the parents about their young children learning experiences at home before entering school, they stated that their 5-year-old, Yazen, learns Arabic and
English. The parents stated that Yazen learns how to speak Arabic from both parents, whose primary language is Arabic, and learns how to speak English from his older brother and sister. The parents stated that that their older children mostly speak English with them and with each other. It seems that Yazen learns Arabic from both parents and English from his siblings.

The parents stated that Yazen can write and read the English alphabet and can count numbers 1 – 100 in English. They stated that he can count and read some Arabic letters and numbers. The parents stated that they both help Yazen to learn letters and numbers, but that the siblings teach him more than the parents do. The parents also help Yazen practice writing his name and his family’s names in Arabic and English. As the mother stated,

“we teach him before he starts school how to write, we help him, in both languages…we teach him how to read in English, of course, but sometimes we talk [in] Arabic ok, but sometimes I mean it is both, mixed.”

The parents stated that Yazen watches TV programs, videos, and films in both Arabic and English. One parent observed, “most of the time my child watches in home like 70 percent to 80 percent English and 20 percent Arabic.”

Parents also considered both Arabic and English languages equally important for their children to learn at home before entering school. The father said,

“both are the same, fifty-fifty. The reason [is] we live here in America. They have to learn English language. They are part of American society. And the other part is Arabic language because they are part of our heritage too. They have to know, for
example, how to speak Arabic language because we come from there. I want them to know some of our heritage, some of our history, some of our roots, their roots.”

The parents stated that they used different ways in teaching their young child Arabic and English by talking with him, reading stories to him, and sending him to the mosque for Arabic language classes.

Additionally, parents considered it important to teach their young child about their own culture and other cultures as well. The father said, “I like my kid to know like where their family came from I mean the history, I mean the culture the religion, our religion it is very important, I mean the more he knows it is better so they know exactly the history, and if we like act in front of him so he knows why we acting this way, I mean he get understanding what we doing and why we doing that…from other cultures we like them to learn like they are part of society, they are part of the other people, they have to ask they have to understand and respect other cultures, I mean know that everybody get different culture in this country and it is good to respect.”

Along with language and culture, the parents teach their young children family values at home, such as how to respect elders and friends. Yazen’s parents stated that their young child learns about family values when he watches the parents’ behaviors. He observes how they act or treat other people during celebrations such as religions holidays, birthday parties, and gatherings in the home. The parents said, “most of it [is] from watching us, how we act, at home and outside. When we go outside [and] take him with us, he watches us, how we talk to people how we greet people.”

The parents stated that they believe Yazen should respect parents first, then respect neighbors and other people. They said, “the first thing (is to) respect like elderly,
whoever. I mean, first his mom and dad, the second thing his neighbors…I mean, respecting the people who are older than him and try to help the people who are older than him, because they come turns for him, and they going to be old and you needs that back again.”

Along with values, the parents stated that they like to teach Yazen rules. They said, “he have to respect his mom, and his dad, to listen to the dad and to the mom, he shouldn’t lie, (he should) love his brothers and sister, and be good to us and to the family.”

The parents described Yazen as independent, saying “he can fixing stuff, arranging stuff, cleaning behind himself all the stuff.” However, the parents also described Yazen as dependent based on the tasks he cannot do as a child his age. As his father said, “I mean he needs a lot of stuff with assistance from education, teaching him stuff, show him what is right, what is wrong. I mean there is too much of stuff he needs too, computer for assistance, like playing outside, how to play soccer, basketball.”

The parents labeled Yazen as unique because he is curious to learn how to fix things. They stated he enjoys piecing pictures together when he plays. The parents stated that most of Yazen’s works are drawings of animals, cars, trees, or people. He also cuts out shapes of boats, rockets, airplanes, hearts, and stars. The parents said that occasionally Yazen writes English numbers and Arabic and English letters and that he thinks this is a fun activity.

When asked about their roles in preparing Yazen for school, the father said, that his role is to “show him school is good” and to “explain that you cannot be good in life unless you get educated.”
The parents stated that they do not feel like they have enough time to teach Yazen about different things. The father said, “of course the time the most thing hinder.” But the Yazen’s parents do provide him with educational materials such as books, CDs, and DVDs. The parents said that they believe that these materials teach alphabets and tell stories that teach manners. Additionally, the parents in this family recognize that Yazen needs something to play with, so they provide games and toys. Occasionally, they play with these toys with Yazen. The parents also stated that they help Yazen choose games and toys that have a goal, like to build something or to teach the sound of letters or days of the week.

Parents stated that most of Yazen’s time at home is spent playing games on the computer, watching television, or drawing, with a smaller amount of time spent playing in the backyard riding his bicycle or swimming in the summer. The father stated:

“most of the time I mean he plays games on the computer, he watches TV, and plays a little bit like in the backyard with his bike and around the neighborhood or in front of the house .. in summer time he swims, but depend[s] on the weather here, not always …drawing, I noticed he draws a lot. He likes to draw, to make his own stuff, but most of the time you gonna find him on the computer , TV, and if the weather is good, you gonna find him outside in the backyard.”

Additionally, the parents stated that at home Yazen watches different television programs, like Barney, and learns new vocabulary words from the programs. His father explained that, “from the TV, he knows how to say words you don’t even know because they watch TV.” The parents said that Yazen also learns new words while he is playing
games on the computer and they added that Yazen knows how to turn the computer on and off and navigate the programs so he can play games. He knows what the words look like and what they mean even though he doesn’t know how to read.

When asking parents about how they spend their time with Yazen, they stated that they spend their time with him watching him when he plays in front of the house or in the yard to make sure he is safe. Inside the house, and to get him away from playing games on the computer or from watching television, they encourage him to engage in other activities. The parents tell Yazen stories about their own childhood experience growing up overseas and about their other relatives still living there. The parents give less time for academic preparations, teaching him some English and basic math concepts. They focus on making learning fun for Yazen.

The parents said that it is important to teach Yazen how to adapt in school, and how to listen to the teacher and make friends. His mother stated, “the most important thing before he go to school, I teach him like to be good, to listen, listen to the teacher, listen what she says so he can learn …make friends, talk to everybody, not to be like on the side, making friends, listen to the teacher and learn from his teacher.”

Academically, the parents believe that at this age, Yazen should just learn simple concepts like letters, some words, and names. The learning should be done in a fun way. The father said, “not official like ‘I want to teach you this page today.’” The father stated that he thought the school does a better job of teaching reading and writing than he could do. Sometimes the parents encourage Yazen to learn how to read or spell words or numbers and correct him if he makes mistakes. The father stated:
“I like to teach them math like fun because math is like fun for kids, like one plus one, two plus two, three plus three. When I teach them math, it is in English, because it is good to teach them in English, good for school. It gonna be good for them for school.”

The parents stated that they do not require Yazen to learn about religion. However, they do teach him how to behave when the parents are praying. The parents read the Quran for him and sometimes ask him to repeat short verses to memorize them. The father said, “he learns at home to pray. We pray sometimes and he learns from us, and he does the same as we did.”

Additionally, the parents stated that Yazen learns about Arabic food at home, particularly from his mother. Sometimes the parents will say the name of a food in English so that Yazen will understand what he is eating. His mother said that every day when she cooks and calls her children to come eat dinner she tells them the names of what they are eating in Arabic.

Yazen’s parents stated that they consider it important for him to learn the Arabic greeting and give the greeting when appropriate and that Yazen is learning the Arabic greeting by imitating them. The parents give the greeting every day, and he learns it just by observing his parents doing it on a consistent basis. The father said, “Arabic greeting, it is by nature, it comes by itself, it is not like a practice you know, it is by nature. Hi, either or “Alslam Alikom” السلام عليكم, you know? It is like, comes by itself. English or Arabic still the same, it comes by itself. We like to say it in Arabic more because we want them to know both languages. It is better for them, more opportunity. It is better if they know Arabic good too. English by nature, by living here they will learn it.”
The Jaara Family

The Jaara family lives in a two-bedroom apartment. Similar to the Yazen’s family, they have both Arabic and American styles of furniture. Parents assigned one room in the apartment to be only for Arabic furniture, with mattresses on the floor and cushions on the sides. They also use this room for the children’s bedroom. They have two sofas in another room. There are pictures of religious places on the walls. Some of the children’s artwork is on the refrigerator with writing in Arabic and English.

The parents stated that they did not come directly to the United States from their home country, Saudi Arabia. They spent several months in England and Europe for work and some school. When they moved to the United States, they came directly to Toledo, Ohio. The father, who is 32 years old, came to pursue his Master’s Degree and PhD. He came to the United States hoping for better educational opportunities for himself and his family.

Both parents in this family are educated. The father has a Bachelor’s degree in Economics and the mother, who is 29 years old, has a Bachelor’s degree in Arabic. The family has 3 children. They are all boys, ages 9 years, 5 years, and 3 months. They all were born outside the United States.

When asked about language use with their 5 year old child, Sameer, the parents stated that he mostly speaks in Arabic because his parents and older brother know Arabic better than English. At home, the parents make available two television channels that Sameer can watch in English and in Arabic. Moreover, his mother stated that she works with Sameer the most because she is the most available. Because her education is in Arabic, she focuses on teaching him how to read and write in Arabic. Conversely, his
father stated that he focuses on teaching Sameer English. He plays flash cards with him as a fun way to learn English letters.

Mr. and Mrs. Jaara stated that they teach Sameer letters, words, and numbers in Arabic and in English about the same amount. However, they also stated that they do not force Sameer to do that if he does not want to do it. His father said, “we not enforce him, we give him all freedom to do what he needs.”

Sameer’s parents provide work books, chalkboards, paper, and pencils and encourage Sameer to choose by himself to develop writing skills. They mentioned that Sameer sees his older brother doing homework and wants to imitate him.

They also bring home English and Arabic newspapers and magazines and encourage and help Sameer to try to read or spell words from the reading materials. They also read stories to Sameer or tell him stories. Additionally, the parents encourage him to try to find and read his name, or the first letters in his siblings’ or parents’ names. The parents also provide audio books that teach reading skills in English and Arabic.

Sameer’s parents consider it very important that their children know how to write their names. They stated that they believe the first step is to make their children enjoy reading and writing by making it entertaining and fun.

The parents also stated that they believe it is more important to teach Sameer how to adapt to school than to teach him how to read or write before he enters school. His father stated, “I think the more important is not only know he can read or write, but the more important to give him more encourage for the school. I think you know the age when he start the kindergarten, like at five, I think from five and more he knows what he need so we not always enforce him to do this one, and we give more freedom to do what
The need, but we give him some guidelines that the school is good. When he like something he will be good in that thing.”

The parents stated that they emphasize teaching Sameer Arabic over English because they believe that Arabic is more complicated. The father said, “I just focus about Arabic more than the English because I believe that when my kid knows more about his Arabic, I mean the English not need that long time to learn. We just came here. In nine months, we speak English. We can write, we can make conversation for anyone. But I believe that our language, I mean the Arabic language, is more complicated and very important to him to learn when he is young.”

Sameer’s parents stated that they explain aspects of religion, such as praying or fasting, to him if he asks. When the parents pray, Sameer has asked about it and imitated them. His parents stated that they encourage Sameer to pray with them, but they do not mandate it. When watching Arabic television channels, his parents call Sameer’s attention to scenes of people praying and explain to him what is happening.

Sameer learns about the Arabic greeting (“Alslam Alikom,” السلام عليكم) through the repetition of hearing them say it every day. He also observes his parents giving the greeting when they meet other visitors. Sameer’s father said he shakes his children’s hands when he comes home to teach his children how to use this form of greeting as well. His father even noted that if he forgets to give the greeting, his children will give the greeting to remind him to do it.

His parents stated that Sameer is curious to know about different things around him. He is always asking questions about a word he hears on television or sees in a book. He plays a game on the computer that tests his math skills. When he does not know the
answer, he asks his father. As the father stated, “he try it by himself; he always curious. He go back to me if he is not find any solution.”

The parents mentioned that they want Sameer to know about the Arabic culture. They teach him how to show respect for elders and parents. They also said that they are open to Sameer asking questions and they try to answer his questions. The father said, “we response for any question in his mind. This more important he ask some question, ‘why you doing like that?’ We give him some as equal to his mind, and we give him between, never block his mind, and we like him to ask any question.”

His parents stated that in addition to the Arabic culture, they teach Sameer the aspects of American culture that they believe are good. His father stated, “I need him to learn about that, how he love to learn, how he learn to respect other people, and he also respect the time. Respect, I think it is more important.”

His parents do not require Sameer to learn and obey rules. They do not believe it is reasonable to expect young children to follow rules because they are too young to obey. Sameer’s parents believe young children are still very active and it is too hard to control them with rules. They believe that their role is, instead, to give advice, be a good role models, and talk to their children about what is right and wrong. Their children are free to explore what they want and they get rewards for good behaviors. His father stated that as long as he was a good example for Sameer, Sameer would follow his example.

When asking the parents about what values they would like to teach Sameer, his parents listed telling the truth, being polite, and respecting adults. They stated that to teach the values, they themselves had to set good examples. The parents also stated that they encouraged Sameer to take advantage of technology, such as the computer and
Arabic channels on the television, so that he can see his home country and how people living there behave. Sameer’s parents stated that watching Arabic television channels reinforces how the parents talk, act, and dress. The parents watch these programs with Sameer and explain the different images or situations. They make connections between what the people on the television value and what the parents value in their own home.

Additionally, the parents encourage Sameer to use the internet to play educational games. They purchase toys that will teach him academic or critical thinking skills. At home, the parents encourage Sameer to engage in tasks that he can do without hurting himself. One parent stated, “we always encourage him to try to do things, but if he realize it is dangerous, so he tell us.”

When asking the parents about the materials and the resources they make available for Sameer, his parents stated that they provide many games, toys, CDs, DVDs, and books. These resources are mostly in English. The parents have acquired books in Arabic from a local Arabic store, relatives, and have also brought some with them from Saudi Arabia. Television with Arabic and English channels is also available, as well as a desktop and laptop. Sameer also has access to writing and drawing tools, such as paper, crayons, and colored pencils. The parents also provide Sameer with educational games and toys. The parents stated that they occasionally play with these materials with Sameer as a way to bond with him.

Sameer’s parents mentioned that Sameer learns new words and sounds of letters from watching the different television shows and cartoons. Similarly, Sameer learns English and Arabic letters and numbers from a computer game on the internet. The parents stated that they control their children’s internet access, only allowing them to
view educational websites. Sameer frequently accesses a website called “myarabicwebsite” where he learns language lessons, listens to songs, and watches movies.

Mr. and Mrs. Jaara stated that Sameer learns a lot of things from his older brother. The parents believe that it is important to teach the oldest sibling first because then the oldest can help teach the younger children. The father explained, “the more important really you just teach the old son about the value and our rules. The younger will be follow that one because he is very close to him. He listen from him more than me. So I think this is the core point. If he has sample between his eyes and he just follow, because he always looking for his big brother. He is the good, he is the strong, he will not make mistake. He can help me, something like that.” From his father’s statement it seems that the parents are aware of how Sameer learns by imitating his older brother.

The parents stated that they believe their role in preparing Sameer for school is to encourage him to love school. The father said, “he will be like shock when he go to new environment. No parents, different faces. He will be maybe scared. The more important to always bring him with you to the school or also public places to give him some encourage. I think this is more important.”

Sameer’s parents reported that at home, Sameer spends more time with his mother than his father. When she is not busy, she teaches him the Arabic alphabet. The father accesses the internet and chooses games for Sameer to play. He leaves Sameer to play the game independently and when he is finished, he joins his parents to watch television. The father stated that his young son is interested in colors, so he also finds games that teach colors. He also brings Sameer scrap paper that is in different colors to play with.
Nevertheless, the parents stated that they do not think they spend enough time with their young children to prepare them for school or life. In the time they do spend with their children, the parents listen to their children, talk with them, and answer their questions. The father plays computer games with Sameer, or plays soccer with him outside. The mother spends some time teaching Sameer Arabic or watching cartoons or other television with him. She also helps him access cartoons on the internet.

The parents showed me some of Sameer’s writing and drawing. I noticed that they are very simple. They consist of animals, and shapes like circles, squares, and stars. He also draws the sun, trees, and houses. He does not use true-to-life colors for the objects he draws. The only sample of writing was Sameer’s name in English. The parents stated that they helped him write his name.

The Hadad Family

The Hadad family lives in a big house with different rooms for the girls and boys. They have specific rooms for exercising, studying, and playing games. The furniture is in Arabic style. There are many mattresses on the floor with cushions. There is also a sofa and chairs with tables. There are big pictures on the walls of religious places, Quran verses, and paintings of the desert, animals, and flowers. There are some words in English and Arabic.

The home has many materials, objects, and resources. The parents recognize the importance of providing different materials and resources at home, and they considered it important for children to both learn and have fun. They provide games, toys, books, DVDs, CDs, video games, an Xbox video game consul, and computers, as well as many video tapes that teach alphabets and numbers.
The father first came to the United States to visit Toledo for a few weeks. Then he moved to different places in Ohio before settling in Toledo. He has lived in Toledo for nine years. He married an American and they live with their family in Toledo.

Both parents are educated. Mr. Hadad has a two-year business college degree and Mrs. Hadad has a high school diploma. He is 39 years old and she is 28 years old.

The father has four children from a previous marriage from before he moved to the United States. These children are living overseas with their mother. He remarried an American and they have two children, a daughter age 5 and a son age 8, who were both born in the United States.

The younger child, Sara, is exposed to both Arabic and English because her father’s native language is Arabic and her mother’s native language is English. Her parents also provide reading materials in both Arabic and English.

Sara’s father teaches her how to write the alphabet and numbers in Arabic, while her mother teaches her how to write her name and address in English. Her parents provide paper, crayons, pencils, and chalkboards to practice writing.

Mr. Hadad tells his children stories about his parents and relatives still living overseas. He believes this is a good way to teach the children Arabic. When a child does not recognize an Arabic word, the parents explain the meaning of the word in English. In this way, Mr. and Mrs. Hadad believe their children are learning both languages. Each language helps the children understand the other language.

The parents believe it is important for their daughter to be able to read in Arabic and English. They provide her with books and educational DVDs and CDs. They encourage her to read words and numbers they see on television or signs they see on
buildings or streets. They have taught her how to read her own name as well as the name of her brother.

Sara’s parents provide Sara with modeling clay, which she uses to form English and Arabic letters. They play with both of their children and ask questions about what activity they are doing to enhance their learning.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadad encourage their children to repeat activities in order to learn new skills. They read for their children, but not on a regular basis. They provide chalkboards and chalk and encourage their children to write letters or words in Arabic and English. They watch their children’s progress and correct their mistakes or answer the children’s questions about how to write a word.

Sara listens to television, music, and sound toys that teach the alphabet and songs. Most of these sources are in English, but some are in Arabic. However, Sara’s father focuses on teaching Sara the Arabic language because he considers it important for her to know it so that she can read the Quran. As he stated, “Arabic is important to our religion, our culture, and for Quran.”

Sara can write in Arabic ABCDE letters and numbers from 1-10. Sara also can write her name and telephone number in Arabic. Her father added, “she also can write the address and say it. If you ask her, ‘what your address?’ she gives information.”

Mr. and Mrs. Hadad stated that Arabic language and religion were the most important aspects of Arabic culture for Sara to learn. Her mother asserted,

“I want her to know about Arabic. The language make[s] her more smart, and it is important, too, to learn about religion.”
Furthermore, Sara’s parents want Sara to visit other children from the same culture and make friends with them as a way to reinforce Arabic language and culture. They emphasize the importance of playing nicely and making friends with other children in the neighborhood.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadad have rules, and they reward Sara for following the rules. The rules are to not fight, respect parents, be polite, and give the Arabic greeting. Sara learned how to follow the rules through observation. Her parents also offer words of encouragement so that Sara will obey the rules. If she misbehaves, her parents discipline her by giving her a chore to do. If she is behaving well, they will take her to her favorite restaurant or buy her a toy or game. Her father stated, “for example if she makes a problem or anything I discipline her by telling her to bring the vacuum and clean the carpet as a discipline. Also, if she does anything bad, I can take away any different games she likes. If she does very well, I will not take anything away from her. That is how I control her.”

Mr. Hadad talks a lot with his children about religion. He stated that he teaches his children to value their religious beliefs. He teaches them to have sympathy and love for others and to be willing to help others. He also teaches them to trust and love themselves. He explains to them what he is doing when he prays or fasts or behaves in any way the children might not understand. Both parents answer their children’s questions and encourage them to pray.

Additionally, the father also takes his children with him to the mosque every Friday to pray. He takes them to the mosque in the month of Ramadan (the month of
fasting) to meet other friends from the same culture and to learn how people act and behave during Ramadan.

Sara learns about the family’s religion through the stories her parents tell. Her father gives examples of how religion is important in their lives and how to treat others with respect. Sara is encouraged to behave well, help others, and cooperate with her friends. Sara’s father reads the *Quran* to her and has her repeat verses so she can memorize them.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadad mostly cook Arabic food, and their children watch them prepare it. The children express curiosity while they observe their parents in the kitchen. The parents tell their children how to say the foods in Arabic and the children learn the Arabic words through repetition. The parents also engage their children in the meal preparation process by asking their children to bring them ingredients or kitchen tools. They use the Arabic names for these items. When the parents call their children to eat, they also name the food that is cooked for that meal.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadad have explained to their children that whenever anyone visits the home, the children must always give the Arabic greeting *(السلام عليكم)* which means “Hi” in English. The children are also taught to say *(Alslam Alikom)* to greet people when they are in a mosque. They have learned the greetings by hearing their father say it every day when he leaves or returns home or makes phone calls.

Mr. Hadad considers his role more important than other resources or materials. He stated that his children should learn first from him and only secondly through what they view on television.
Sara’s parents teach her that television is both good and bad. She enjoys watching cartoons, the weather channel, and news that shows what is happening outside the country. Her father stated, “from TV, she can spend good time for herself instead being bored. [She will] watch cartoons, watch news and weather channel. She loves that, and what happens outside the country.”

Sara uses the computer mostly to play video games, and not to develop academic skills. “from the computer, Sara loves to play games, but at the same time [it] is bad, just games.” Sara knows how to turn the computer on, start a game, or play with the drawing program. She knows how to operate the DVD and CD players in the computer.

In addition to the television and the computer, Sara learns from books as well. Her mother stated that “she learns from books before entering school. Stories, cartoons, pictures.” Mr. Hadad said that Sara needs help to do many things. “I help her a lot in religion – how to trust herself, how to talk with friend, how to be nice, how to trust people, how to pray, how to read, how to treat people, how to talk with people.”

The parents described their daughter as curious to learn about different things. “she loves a lot to play with her toys, to play with truck, piece things or parts together. She likes to build railway station.”

When not eating a meal, Sara spends most of her time playing with her toys or games. She also watches Arabic and English cartoons on television. Sometimes she draws, plays computer games, or rides her bicycle. Very little time is spent practicing how to read, write, or count numbers.

The parents spend time with Sara at home in different ways. Sometimes they read Arabic and English stories before bedtime. They also pray with her. They take both of
their children fishing or to visit relatives and friends. The father takes his children to the mosque every Friday. The children help him clean the house or yard and water the flowers. The father also sometimes plays soccer with his children.

I have observed that Sara’s writing is all in English, with letters, words, and simple sentences. She uses upper and lower case letters in the same word. In drawing, the colors Sara uses do not match the true colors of the objects she draws.

**The Al-Kayalli Family**

The Al-Kayalli family lives in a townhouse with a lot of space. There are both American and Arabic furniture styles. The parents consider the Arabic style an important part of their culture and have used it in all of their homes. The walls have pictures of religious places and Arab proverbs.

Mr. and Mrs. Al-Kayalli provide their children with televisions, computers, DVDs, CDs, and books in Arabic and English. There are desks for studying and a small library. There is a front yard where the children can play with balls and ride their bicycles.

The parents came to United States directly from their own country. Their parents and many relatives had already been living in the United States for a long time. After arriving, they decided to stay with their family. They came directly to Toledo and have lived in the city for 19 years. The father has a high school diploma and the mother has a Bachelor’s Degree in Arabic. The father is 45 and the mother is 35 years old. The family has 3 children, 2 sons ages 9 and 5, and one daughter, age 8. All were born in the United States.
Mr. and Mrs. Al-Kayalli provide their children with a balance of fun and educational materials. They provide toys that teach the alphabet and the sound of the letters, and they take their children to workshops where they are exposed to different materials as well.

Many literacy materials are available. The parents provide boards, paper, pencils, workbooks, and flash cards for children to practice how to write letters and words in Arabic and in English. The parents and older children help the youngest son, Adam, learn how to write letters in both languages.

The parents develop their children’s language skills by having conversations with them and encouraging their children to talk with other people who visit. They speak to their children mostly in Arabic and teach them the meaning of Arabic words. They play with flash cards. They teach their children how to write in Arabic and English and let them test their abilities. The parents read to them and ask questions to see if they understand, or they write a word and have the children copy the letters underneath.

Adam is equally exposed to Arabic and English languages in the home. The children talk with each other in English and Arabic, but mostly in Arabic. The parents talk with each other in Arabic and to their children in English and Arabic. The grandmother speaks to everyone in Arabic.

Adam watches television shows and cartoons in Arabic and English. He listens mostly to Arabic songs that teach him the alphabet or to religious songs. DVDs and CDs have the Quran and religious songs and alphabet songs in Arabic and English.

Additionally, Adam learns both Arabic and English from watching Arabic and American television channels. He also plays with computer programs and learns how to
read some words in both languages. His parents read to him, and he repeats after his parents to practice how to read.

Adam learns manners and other skills from his siblings. His father stated,

“I think he learns how to share toys, how to interact with other people in different situations he plays. [I] sometimes think, imagine there are many things he can learn from his brother and sister. And I think sometimes he can learn from his brother how to put a face together, how to be creative, how to get a new idea, and in doing things how to find a solution.”

Adam’s mother added that the older children help Adam by reading for him. She said, “sometimes they read for him, read a story, and when they are reading, reading aloud, he listens. And sometimes he answers some question or [is] asking me questions about what I [am] reading. Sometime his older sister try to be his teacher and she teaches him the alphabet in Arabic and in English.”

The parents stated that they consider both Arabic and English as important for Adam to learn. However, they focus more on teaching Arabic in the home. Adam’s father explained, “Arabic and English in the same level. We try to emphasize both language[s] side by side. If they lack of some vocabulary of English and they don’t know it in Arabic, we tell them the words in Arabic and the same, vice versa, in English. Both for school, for contact, communicate with others. I mean, people in our society and for religion purpose, we focus on Arabic language. But we use English as well, because he is going to public school, and the public school, basically it is English. So we encourage him to learn Arabic as well as English language so he can participate, or express himself in both.
What is the most important for the children? It is English, but as I said, we focus on both of them so he can learn both of them on the same level.”

The mother added, “we focus on Arabic at the beginning because we know that he is going to learn English and his is going to speak English most of the time. That is why we focus on Arabic at the beginning, before school time. We might start reading stories to him, like maybe games on the computer, English games, or watching English cartoon, but we care at the beginning about Arabic. Because if he learns Arabic at the beginning, he won’t lose it.”

To help Adam read, his parents bring home newspapers in Arabic or advertising from Arabic stores. Adam looks at the pictures and tries to read letters or words. His parents ask him how to read the words and they explain what it means. His mother also uses flash cards as a game to teach Adam how to read Arabic words. Both parents read a lot to Adam in both languages.

Mrs. Al-Kayalli, who is an Arabic teacher, reads books to Adam. She points to words in a book or writes words and asks Adam to read them. She also tells Adam to find the letters of his name in newspapers and magazines and encourages him to copy words and sentences so he can practice writing.

Adam’s mother stated that Adam can write the alphabet in Arabic and English. He can also write his name and can write words or copy sentences his mother wrote for him. As she stated, “he can write the alphabet. He write[s] his name, I mean last names in Arabic and English, and write[s] letters with Arabic and English, and he is able to write any sentences, any word in Arabic. To imitate, just do it again without tracing, he can do it by himself. Sometimes he use[s] his brother and sister’s books, or sometime[s] I write
the sentence for him and he can just copy the same sentence or the word. So he writes both American English letters, alphabet, or sometimes copying words.”

Mr. Al-Kayalli added he does not like to push Adam to learn how to write or make it a required task. He only encourages Adam to write, saying, “he has another sibling and he sees them writing, so we keep him busy at the same time. So he writes. He enjoys it. We don’t force him not to do it or do it.”

When asked about what they believe is important for Adam to learn about in the Arabic culture, the parents stated that they want him to learn to respect others and share with others. They believe it is important for Adam to know the norms of his culture so that he can adapt when he meets others from his culture. Adam’s father stated that he wants Adam to learn “how to respect the rules. As far as the daily life, things from get up, wash, prepare himself, dress up, habit, the way he eat, the way he wash, go to the bathroom, all kind of stuff. So when he meet with some other people from the same community, he knows what he do. All that also apply for even for the religion. It apply for everything.”

Aside from Arabic culture, Mr. and Mrs. Al-Kayalli stated that they want Adam to learn from American culture as well. His father said, “the most important things we like him to learn from other culture, basically the American culture, to be on time, organize, believe what you are doing, love what you are doing, respecting the elder, other people, follow the rule, obey the law.”

The parents listed many rules they want all of their children to follow at home. They tell their children about the rules and set a good example for their children by following the rules as well. For example, the parents tell their children to washing their
hands before they eat or after they use the restroom. They must remove their shoes before entering the house “in our home we should take the shoes before they enter the house I mean that is one of the rule,” eat in the kitchen, put away their toys when they are done playing with them, and practice good hygiene. The children have specific times scheduled for doing homework and going to bed. They are taught to share their toys and not touch objects that do not belong to them. They are limited in the amount of candy they may eat. They are taught how to give the Arabic greeting and make supplications (“Doaha,” دعاء) at the appropriate times. “They need to greet people in the home when enter the house to make (“Doaha,” دعاء), when they go out of the house, when they get in the car.”

Through example and encouragement, Mr. and Mrs. Al-Kayalli teach their children how to respect elders, tell the truth, believe in themselves, and help others. They show Adam how to pray and pray with him. They answer his questions about religious practices. They do not make him fast, but they talk to him about what it means. In this way, the parents believe they give him a background and an understanding of the religion and make it easier to practice the religion as he grows up.

Adam’s parents describe him as both dependent and independent. He needs help bathing and putting DVs in the computer, however, he can organize and fix his toys and games. One parent stated that Adam is “both dependent and independent, as his personality in general. If he needs help, he ask if he cannot do it by himself. Generally, he is independent.”
Adam’s parents further stated that Adam “like[s] to explore a lot. He like[s] to learn. He try to fix stuff sometimes. He is more creative when he play[s] with his Legos, his toys. He draw[s]. He is very good in drawing.”

Mr. and Mrs. Al-Kayalli teach Adam what types of foods they are prohibited from eating so he will know how to distinguish the foods when he enters school. Adam learns about foods from watching his mother cook or from going to celebrations for specific events.

Adam is taught to greet everyone he meets with the Arabic greeting (Alslam ألسalam عليكم - Alslam Alikom - السلام عليكم), which means “Hi.” The parents remind their children to give this greeting when the children forget to do it. They also insist that their children give the Arabic greeting at a mosque or when visiting relatives. Giving the greeting is a way for the children to show respect and indicates to others that the parents are raising their children well.

The parents believe their role in preparing Adam for school should focus on his social skills. They want to teach Adam to be independent. One parent stated, “for his age, how to clean himself…before he eating [and] after, be neat, clean, organize, not cross the other people, fighting with others, respecting the others. Just the kind general rules. Speak the truth, speak up, be clear about yourself. Reading [and] writing, it is very important, but as we said earlier, we take in a regular basis in a daily and a very little, and that is going to build up on their own when they grow up.”

Adam spends time at home watching television, playing with his toys, or playing educational games on the internet. The parents play the Quran on the computer so he can
listen to it and memorize it while he is playing computer games. He also plays with other children from the neighborhood.

When asking Mr. and Mrs. Al-Kayalli about the time they spend with Adam, they stated that they take every opportunity to spend time with him and teach him. They teach him how to respect others, how to share, and how to be social. They teach him the Arabic and English alphabets, and how to write his name in both languages. They help him access the internet to play games or watch television with them. Additionally, they sit outside and watch him play in the front yard.

Adam’s sample work is mostly written in Arabic. He has written the words duck, lion, door, mother, father, his name, and some numbers. He created these drawings and writings with some help from his mother.

**The Awad Family**

This family owns a big house with a big yard. Similar to the other family homes, this one has both Arabic and American style furniture. The Arabic furniture is in the biggest room of the house and the smaller room has American style furniture. The walls have pictures of nature, *Quran* verses, and the name of God and prophet Mohammad.

The father came directly to Toledo, Ohio to study and has lived in Toledo all 19 years he has been in the United States. He has moved within the Toledo area five times. He is married to an American.

The father has a high school diploma and the mother has completed one year of college. The father is 38 and the mother is 31. This family has 6 children—3 sons ages 14, 9, and 2; and 3 daughters ages 12, 10, and 5. All were born in the United States.
The home has televisions, a desktop computer, many books in Arabic and English, paper, pencils, magazines, and newspapers. The parents provide educational games, video games, and different toys that teach literacy and math concepts. The parents also help their children operate the television and computer. Most of the DVDs and CDs that the children can use are educational.

Nora, the youngest daughter, is exposed to Arabic and English. Her father’s native language is Arabic, so he teaches her Arabic. Likewise, her mother’s native language is English, so she teaches her English.

Nora’s father sits with her and speaks to her in Arabic. He reads to her from the Quran and focuses on the language. Conversely, Nora’s mother teaches Nora words in English. She reads stories to her and talks with her in English.

Nora speaks with her brothers and sisters mostly in English, with her mother in English, and with her father in Arabic and English. Mr. and Mrs. Awad speak with each other in English. The grandfather speaks Arabic with all the family members.

The parents stated that both English and Arabic are equally important for their children to learn before they entering school. One parent said, “they [are] living here and they [are] going to speak English, but also Arabic as also their culture and, you know, it is their background. So they need to know both.”

Nora learns both languages by listening to music in English and the television in Arabic and English. She listens to the Quran on television and from CDs.

Nora’s mother plays word games with Nora to teach her to write. Her father shows her how to write Arabic letters and gives her workbooks so she can practice
writing. Her mother added, “she can write in English, she can write her alphabet, but all in English.”

Mrs. Awad teaches Nora how to read by using an internet spelling game and reading books to her in both Arabic and English. She also helps Nora access video games that teach math, language, and reading.

Nora likes to read words when it helps her play a game or when she is curious. Her mother said, “she reads, like[s] to play games, she knows what she is doing. Just things that she needs, so just read it. She just curious to read.”

In writing, Nora practices both Arabic and English. Her mother reported that “she has workbooks to work for both.”

Nora’s father added, “like in Arabic, like I write for her some religious stuff like ‘There is only one God and the last prophet is Mohammad based upon him’ things like that. ‘God forgave me’ I write them in Arabic and she writes them.”

Mr. and Mrs. Awad considered these literacy basics important to prepare Nora for school. Mrs. Awad said, “they just make them ready for school, because if they going to school and they do not have any of these things already, you know they lost it. When we prepare her at home, it is something normal. And when they go to school they going to do this, but if they just do it in school, they [are] going to [have] lost a lot of time just getting prepared their mentality to read that.”

Nora’s mother watches television with Nora to help her learn lessons. They watch Sesame Street together and Nora’s mother helps Nora count the numbers or spell the letters. Nora learns through repetition of these lessons.
Nora also uses the computer to learn math and reading. Most of the programs are in English. She plays games according to her age or level of development. Nora also has access to DVDs and CDs.

When asking the parents about what they believe is important for their young children to learn about the Arabic culture, they said religion and respect. They believe children should behave and learn the Arabic language. Mr. Awad said, “first of all the religion, respecting people and the religion does a lot, which is teach them how to respect. When they eat together, how to talk to people, how to respect the guest. When they go outside, they have to have some manners, how to act. You should speak in your language to them if they do something wrong. You do not want to embarrass your child. You tell him in your language, ‘you know this, you shouldn’t do this because it is not right.’”

The parents also mentioned that it is important for their children to learn from other cultures. Nora’s mother said, “I think it is important for the kids to learn from any and every culture that would help them [have a] better understanding of what is going on around them. They cannot just learn about one culture, one religion, and that’s it.”

The rules at home include cleaning up after one’s self, “they have to clean behind themselves” and respecting others. The children are only allowed to watch cartoons on television. The parents supervise and restrict the internet. “I don’t like them to watch anything in the cable, just cartoon.” The children must wear a seatbelt. They must play nicely with each other and not damage the furniture. They must remove their shoes before entering the house.
The young children learn about family values by observing their parents and the way their parents show respect. Mr. and Mrs. Awad have shown their children how to pray, but otherwise do not make a conscientious effort to teach family values. Nora’s father stated, “I like them to learn how to pray on time and live their life, you know, as a good Muslim person. You know this way you [are] going [to] be very successful.”

Nora’s parents said that she is curious to learn from her older siblings. Her mother said, “what I see, she has older brothers and sisters and she does picks up everything, you know, from them, just does it, you know, not really any direction or anything.” Nora also learns from older sibling when they play with each other. The older siblings help her to write her name or letters.

Mr. and Mrs. Awad have observed that Nora likes to explore and learn independently. Her mother stated, “she likes to log in the computer when she sees other sisters and brothers playing games and something. She likes to draw and write stuff like that. She is always picking up a book, even before she could read she put her book in front of her and she just look[s] at the pictures and make[s] her own stories from the book. Even if she couldn’t read yet, she did this.”

When asking the parents about their role in preparing Nora for school, they reported that they help Nora by reading stories to her and teaching her right and wrong. One parent stated, “we kept working with her, when she went to school it wasn’t a big surprise to her that something that may be different.”

The parents also believe that an important part of their role as parents is teaching their young children about religion. For example, the family prays and visits the mosque together. The father reads from the Quran. They say (الحمد لله “Al-hamdu lillahi”) which
means “thanks good” after eating, and before they eating they say (“Bismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-rahīm,” بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم), which means “in the name of the God.” Mr. and Mrs. Awad regard their religion as a way of life that is practiced throughout the day and that the children learn by observing their parents.

Moreover, the children learn from their parents at home about Arabic food. The young children frequently watch or help their mother cook Arabic and American food. Even though their mother is American, she cooks mostly Arabic foods and teaches her children about the foods by allowing them to help her with the cooking.

Additionally, their father teaches the children about Arabic foods by taking them to Arabic restaurants or grocery stores. The children will ask him about foods they do not recognize. Mr. Awad also said he would take his children traveling with him to his native country and teach them about Arabic foods there as well.

The young children learn the Arabic greeting from their father, who always says it when leaving or entering the home. The father also takes his children to the mosque where they use the Arabic greeting with people there.

Nora spends most of her time at home playing in her room or playing on the computer. She is restricted to watching television only one hour per day.

When asked about the time the parents spend with Nora at home, they claimed that they read to her or play computer games with her. Nora’s mother spends time with her in the kitchen teaching her manners and going through workbooks. She takes a few minutes every day to teach Nora something different. She stated that she wished she had more time to spend with Nora and with each of her other children. Nora’s father works
many hours, but when he does have time, he teaches Nora Arabic, prays with her, and sometimes takes her to the mosque.

Most of Nora’s writing is in English. She writes letters of the Arabic alphabet and names or phrases. Her parents show her how to write these words and then she tries to copy it by herself.

The Habib Family

The Habib family lives in an apartment furnished with both the American and Arabic styles. There is a small room only for Arabic furniture. The living room has two sofas. On the walls, there are pictures in English about how to cross the street and some of the children’s artwork, such as people, stars, hearts, houses, and trees.

The parents in this family came directly from overseas to the United States. They lived in Michigan for 3 years, and then moved to Toledo. The father, 38, has a Bachelor’s degree and the mother, 31, has a Master’s degree. Both parents are currently graduate students. This family has twin daughters, Mary and Hala, aged 5, who were born outside the United States.

The home contains different games and toys, books, audio books, boards for writing, chalks with different colors, papers, crayons, puzzle games, and Legos. The mother stated that whenever she has time, she reads stories to her daughters in English. She asks them about the words and tests their ability to read or spell. She also writes words and has her daughters copy the words. When the children are listening to audio books, their mother has the children point to the words as they are being spoken.
For writing, Mary and Hala’s mother provides chalkboards, pencils, paper, and workbooks with tracing paper. She does not focus much on showing Mary and Hala how to write. The children know the alphabet, their names, and just a few letters in Arabic.

For reading, Mrs. Habib provides books and audio books in English. The books have short stories that teach manners and self-confidence. The audio books teach how to listen and repeat words. Mary and Hala’s mother reads to them and asks them to spell words or read words in the book.

Mary and Hala are exposed to both Arab and English languages, but not equally. They spend most of their time at home with their grandmother, who speaks only Arabic. The children speak with their parents mostly in English. The parents talk with their children in both Arabic and English.

To learn Arabic, Mrs. Habib sits at the computer with Mary and Hala and plays Arabic alphabet songs. She lets them listen to a song and see the letters and then has them write what they remember, giving them a reward for remembering more letters. She also sits with her children while they are listening to audio books and makes sure that they can understand what they are hearing. She asks them to repeat words or spell words that they do not understand. She tells her children stories in Arabic and English before they go to bed. Mary and Hala her about words they do not recognize in English or Arabic and she explains the words to them.

Additionally, Mary and Hala listen to the TV in Arabic and in English. They also listen to Arabic videos or songs that teach lessons in Arabic. They have some CDs of the Quran in Arabic.
Mrs. Habib believes that both Arabic and English languages are important for her daughters to learn. She regards Arabic as a tool to communicate with parents and relatives and English as important because they live in the United States and they need it for school. She stated, “English because we live in the United States. They need to learn English to be easier for them in school to communicate with their friends. And Arabic, I want them to learn Arabic because I have also relatives in Jordan, so they have to know how to communicate with their relatives when we go visiting. So both language[s] are important for my kids.”

Mary and Hala can read letters, phone numbers, and other simple writing. They can write letters in English and few letters in Arabic, as well as their names. Mrs. Habib reported, “they write letters and their names in English. They start learn Arabic just few months ago, so they still didn’t know. They know just the letters.”

Mrs. Habib understands that learning the basics of reading and writing can help young children perform well when they enter school. She stated, “It will help them if they can read and learn to read and write at home before school. It will help them because they will be familiar with the letters and everything. It will help them adapt [to] school and with teachers it will be easier.”

Mary and Hala’s mother considers Arabic language and religion as the most important elements in her culture for her daughters to learn. She believes these elements distinguish Arabic culture from all other cultures. She said, “the language is very important for them to learn in order for them to communicate with other relatives that live overseas when they go for visiting. Also, the custom, like how they dress, because we are Muslim. So, how they dress will reflect our religion and our culture.”
Furthermore, Mrs. Habib considers learning English to be the most important element her daughters can learn from American culture.

The family rules are that the children must love other children and respect all adults, particularly the parents and grandmother. Mrs. Habib also added “they have to behave. They have to clean their room, to put their books away. They have to sleep, go to bed on time.”

To teach her young children about family values, Mrs. Habib talks to them and tells stories. She stated that the values she wants her daughters to learn are respecting parents and others, behaving well in public and at home, and self-confidence.

As for religious beliefs and practices, Mary and Hala learn about their family’s religion by watching their mother and grandmother praying or reading the Qur’an and asking about what they see them doing. Sometimes the mother recites Qur’an verses and asks her daughters to repeat them. She allows them to copy her when she prays, even though she knows they do not understand what they are doing. There is an internet website that reads the Qur’an continuously, and Mrs. Habib plays this website for her daughters and their grandmother. The mother also answers any questions the children have about their religious practices.

In addition to religion, the grandmother teaches Mary and Hala about Arabic food. The children observe their grandmother cooking, and when the grandmother uses the Arabic words for different foods, the children learn them. For example, when the grandmother asks one of the children to get her a potato, she says (batata - بطاطس). In this way, the children learn the words for Arabic foods. The mother also teaches the children what foods the children may not eat when they are at a restaurant.
Giving the Arabic greeting is a sign of good manners, so parents teach their children at a very early age how to give the Arabic greeting. Accordingly, Mrs. Habib has taught her daughters how to say (السلام عليكم) Alslam Alikom which means “Hi,” whenever they leave or return home, go to the mosque, visit friends or relatives, or meet other people. Mary and Hala learn the greeting from watching Arabic television channels as well.

Mrs. Habib described Mary and Hala as both dependent and independent. She stated, “they are independent sometimes. When they eat, they want to eat by themselves. Or like clean up, but they cannot take [a] bath by themselves, so they are dependent. Related to reading and writing, yeah, they always ask how to write something. They can say the word, and they need [to know] what the spelling of this word is… or they want to do things by themselves. Writing, they try first, and then they will ask.”

Mary and Hala also are curious to test their abilities on how to spell a word or write letters or words. Their mother said, “they like to write and they come like to me [asking] how to spell this word, how to spell that word.”

Mary and Hala learn from the television Arabic and English languages and how to respect others. They also learn how to use a computer. They can turn it on or off and type words. They learn vocabulary by playing computer games. Their mother has helped them access websites that teach Arabic and English alphabets and numbers. They know how to use video communications, like Skype, to talk to relatives overseas.

Mary and Hala learn new vocabulary from books as well. Mrs. Habib reads to them and asks questions about the stories. The children pay attention to the pictures in the books and identify words that match the pictures.
When I asked Mrs. Habib about her role in preparing her daughters to enter school, she stated, “I can prepare like let them put time to sleep, that way they can wake up early, so this will help them to be prepared. And talk to them about when you enter school you have to behave, you have to respect your teacher, you have to respect the other kids, don’t hit other people, you have to obey the rule in school.”

Mary and Hala spend their time at home playing with each other or their cousins. They play computer games as well. They also like to write letters and numbers and draw. Mrs. Habib spends time with Mary and Hala reading stories in English and teaching them how to write in Arabic and English. She watches television with them, teaches them how to use the computer to access programs like the painting program and lets them draw. She helps her daughters clean their rooms, reads the *Quran* to them, and teaches them how to memorize verses from the *Quran*.

Outside the apartment, Mary and Hala ride their bicycles on the sidewalk or in the park. There is a playground at the mosque where the children can play with each other on swings and slides as well.

Most of Mary and Hala’s writing is in English. They write their names and the alphabet. Only a few letters are in Arabic. They draw trees, people, cars, and the sun.

**Summary**

The following section summarizes the moving history, the background of the parents and children, the physical environment, and the children’s writings and drawings. The summary includes information from the observations and the field notes during each visit to the Arab American homes, in addition to information from the parents’ answers to the interview questions.
The parents gave various reasons for relocating to the United States. Some mentioned that they were seeking better economic and educational opportunities for themselves and their children. More specifically, some parents stated that they came to pursue a Master’s degree or PhD. Another parent came to the United States for school and could not afford it, so he works and sends money to his family overseas.

Other parents came to the United States first as visitors. They read about opportunities to start businesses in the United States and that it was a good country in which to live and work, or they came because the majority of their family already lived here. The parents stated that they value American education and they regard American people as very friendly.

Most parents came directly from overseas to Toledo and only moved around within the Toledo area. Those that did not move directly to Toledo spent time in Europe or the United Kingdom for a few months to work. One parent who moved around a lot now considers Toledo his home city.

All of the parents speak both Arabic and English. Of all twelve parents, ten of them identified Arabic as their primary language. Even those whose native language is English can also speak Arabic. All of the parents speak both Arabic and English to their children. The language they use depends on the situation.

Arab Americans can come from one of 22 different countries (Manning & Baruth, 2009; Al-Khatab, 1999). The parents in this study come from Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan.

The fathers’ ages range from 32 to 45. The mothers’ age in range from 31 to 35. The family annual income level ranges from $20,000 to $35,000. The fathers either have
a high school diploma or Bachelor’s degree. The mothers are educated from high school to Master’s Degree. All parents are Muslim.

The number of children in these families ranges from 2-6. The ages for sons range from 3 months to 14 years old, for daughters the age range is from 5-16. Twelve of the children were born in the United States and 9 were born outside the United States. All of the children also have Arabic names. Most of the children speak both Arabic and English.

During the visits to the six Arab American families in their homes, most notable was that the predominantly used language was Arabic. The children rarely switched to speaking in English. Even when the children did speak to their parents in English, the parents responded in Arabic. For example, when a child asked in English if he could go outside to play, the parent responded in Arabic. Only one father was observed speaking directly to his children in English. The grandparents only spoke in Arabic because they do not speak English well.

During the visits, notes of the physical environment were taken, which included furniture style, wall decorations, and the materials and objects in the home.

Most homes combined the Arabic and American furniture styles. They had a room with thin wool mattresses on the floor and cushions to recline on, as well as a room with a sofa, chairs, and coffee tables. The parents stated that they liked the Arabic style because it reminded them of their own homes growing up and they thought it was comfortable. They also had an American style for watching the television for a short time and to receive guests that were not Arab, or who preferred sitting on sofas.

Wall decorations consisted mostly of pictures of religious places, like Mecca, the name of God and the prophet Mohammad, and Quran verses. Some parents displayed
their children’s artwork on the walls and refrigerator. A few families also had framed photographs of the family and relatives and pictures of nature.

There were many objects and resources for the children to play with or learn from in the homes. The families had televisions with Arabic and English channels, computers, DVDs, CDs, video game consoles, books in Arabic and English, games, drawing and writing materials, and Legos. Parents had rooms for studying and playing. Many homes had backyards or front yards with swings, slides, balls, and bicycles. One home even had a swimming pool.

At home the parents provide their younger children with different materials and objects they believe are important to enhance their learning experiences before entering school. For writing, they give their children paper, pencils, pens, construction paper, and books in English and Arabic. For drawing, they give them colored paper, crayons, colored pencils, watercolor paints, markers, coloring books and tracing paper. The parents believe writing and drawing allows their children to express themselves and communicate how they feel and how they perceive the world. The drawings reflect the children’s imagination and interests.

In addition to materials for writing and drawing, the parents provide books that contain both fiction and non-fiction stories to promote reading. Most of the books are in English, but some are in Arabic.

The parents also provide other materials and objects for their young children that encourage memorization or spatial intelligence. These items include workbooks, work games, video games, toys that teach alphabets through songs or sounds, and toys that
teach the names of animals, colors, vegetables and fruits. The parents provide their children with clay for sculpting, Legos for building, rulers, hole-punches, and staplers.

Some parents provide toys that encourage physical activity. One family has a special exercise room where the children can play with the exercise equipment. They also have a swing set, slide, and trampoline in the backyard. The children have jump ropes and scooters.

All parents expose their young children to technology, providing them different DVDs and CDs in English and Arabic. The DVDs and CDs parents provide are for educational purposes. The stories teach children good manners, letters and numbers, or about other cultures (e.g., *Dora the Explorer* in Arabic).

The young children in these homes are exposed only to two languages, Arabic and English. To promote reading, the parents provide magazines, newspapers, advertising junk mail, books, DVDs, and CDs. To promote writing, the parents provide boards, pencils, chalk, and paper. Children hear Arabic and English equally on television. They play with sound toys and computer games that teach both Arabic and English vocabulary words.

In addition to providing the materials and the objects, the parents also actively engage with the children by playing with the materials and objects with their children. They also speak to their children in Arabic and English.

When asking the parents about the family rules, most parents gave many examples that were similar. However, the parents varied in which rules they considered most important for children to learn and obey. Some parents viewed rules as a way to control their child’s behavior. Other parents viewed rules as a way to show the child how
to behave in ways acceptable to society. Some parents believed following rules was a sign of respect for the parents’ values. Only one parent differed, and did not believe that it is not reasonable to place rules on young children at home because they are too young to follow them.

Some parents encouraged their children to follow rules by rewarding them. On the other hand, when rules are not obeyed, the parents stated that they punish their children by taking away toys or games or making them do chores.

Examples of the types of rules that parents made their children follow included behaviors to promote good hygiene, how to show respect to elders and siblings, how to clean up after themselves, and how to spend their time.

The young children spend their time at home doing various activities divided between learning knowledge for school and having fun. They play computer games, watch television, draw, or ride their bicycles. In the summer they also go swimming or fishing. They spend time with their parents praying, shopping, visiting relatives, and listening to the parent read books. The children participate in activities that allow them to be creative. They make crafts with paper or help cook food.

The parents are conscientious of keeping their younger children busy or engaged while the parents are helping older children with homework. The younger children will write and draw at the table while the older siblings are doing homework, or they will watch cartoons or play in their rooms.

The young children spend most of their time interacting with whoever is available the most. When the older siblings are not doing homework, the younger children spend time with them, talking with them about cartoon shows and playing games with them.
However, the children do not talk with each other about school or anything related to learning letters and numbers.

When siblings are at school, young children interact with whichever parent or grandparent is at home and not working. For many families, the father worked and the mother stayed at home; therefore, the mother interacted with the children the most.

Results revealed that while the parents spend time with their young children at home, they differ in how they use that time. For example, the parents spend time watching their kids while they are playing in backyard or in front of the house to make sure they are safe. They play soccer with their children. They spend time teaching their children using fun educational games that entertain the child. They help their children clean their rooms. They read them stories in English and Arabic.

Although the families watch television together, the parents encourage their children to engage in activities besides watching television or playing computer games. However, the parents stress that all activities, even ones that promoted learning, should be fun so that the children do not start to resent learning. The parents play games with their children and draw or color with them and use these opportunities to teach them names of objects, colors, or other words.

Some parents spend specific time every day eating meals with their children. They use this time to teach children manners and how to make conversation. They give advice about how to be respectful and tell stories about their own lives, hoping their children can learn from their experiences. They talk about dangerous incidents and explain to their children how they can avoid it for themselves. They talk about their culture, their home country, and how to talk with other people in a proper way.
Which parent spends more time with the children and what they spend time teaching their children differed among the families. In some cases, the mother teaches the children most of time because she stays at home while the father is working. In other cases, the mother was the primary teacher because it is viewed as her inherent role as a mother. The mothers teach their children how to respect parents and relatives and all adults, how to behave in public and be polite, how to clean up after themselves, and how to help their siblings with household chores.

In other cases both parents share the responsibilities of teaching their younger children to prepare them for school, and each parent emphasizes a different area of learning. The mother is the one who teaches the kids how to read, write, and use the computer. She reads stories for the children. The father’s role is to discipline his children and show them how to respect adults. In one family the father teaches Arabic while the mother teaches English. In another family, the division of responsibilities between mother and father depends on the child’s age, not the subject matter. In that case, the mother teaches the younger children and the father teaches the older school-aged children. Some parents jointly teach their kids how to love themselves, and how to love their families, friends, and school.

Samples of the Children’s Writing and Drawing

Upon request, the parents provided samples of their children’s writing and artwork. I only requested children’s artifacts from the children who were of kindergarten age. The samples were analyzed according to specific categories: Drawing; Drawing with written text in English and Arabic; Text in English and Arabic. Within each category, the topic, language used, and degree of details in each work were examined. The sample
works with drawings and written text in English showed a mix of abilities. For example, one child wrote “here is my mom” in English at the top of the paper, then drew a picture of her mother and signed the picture with her name. Her letters were a mix of upper and lower case. She did not use colors appropriate for the objects she drew. The sun was a mix of yellow and green. The mother was several different colors with very little detail – just two eyes, mouth, hair, and legs.

Another child tried to write the sentence “my animal is a dog it eats bone it can do flips,” but instead wrote, “my aNmoLe is a dogFox it Eat’s bone it can do FLlipS.” The child also drew a picture for dog, bone, sky, clouds, flower, and two trees. In this work the child chose appropriate colors for the things he drew.

Similarly, another child wrote the word desert as “DeseRt” and the word mother as “MyatheR.” The child drew a picture for the desert with an airplane, sun, desert trees, people, animals, and a scorpion. The colors were appropriate for each picture.

The sample words with drawings and written text in Arabic were less common. One child’s picture of a car shows just two wheels and a line connecting the wheels. Under the picture is the Arabic word for car. The letters are not connected and there are no dots, which are needed to indicate how a word is pronounced. The child also drew pictures for door, book, and pencil, and wrote the Arabic words underneath them.

Similarly, some of the children’s work with just Arabic writing and no pictures also left out the dots and did not connect the letters. Some of the letters were very big and sloppy and the dots were too big or too small. Another child wrote the first four of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet. The spacing between the letters was not equal, but the letters themselves were neat and correctly written. Letters written in English showed the
same sloppiness and mix between upper and lower case letters within the words. Even when writing names, the children continued to mix the cases and did not evenly space their letters or write them in a straight line.

Very few samples works showed written numbers. One child wrote the letters 1 to 13 in English and put them inside a drawing of a house fence. Another child drew a clock with numbers and pointed the hands so it was 8 o’clock.

In drawing alone, the children’s work varied. One child drew a duck in the middle of a large piece of paper. The duck’s head was green, with a yellow nose and body. The area around the duck was gray. The child colored the sun yellow and the sky blue. Another child drew a flower with red, green, and blue colors. The grass was green and the sky was blue.

In addition to these two examples from the children’s drawings, other children also drew different pictures that showed dancing girls, pigs, ducks pencils, tables, heads, houses, stars, kites, hearts, squares, hands, arrows, flowers, clocks, mice, and smiling faces.

Following are two tables that summarize the children’s works. It includes the number and type of artifacts and the characteristics of these works.

Table 6

*Types of Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Artifacts</th>
<th>Drawing</th>
<th>Drawing with Text</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family 1: Al-Kateeb</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family 2: Jaara</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family 3: Hadad  3  4  2  9  
Family 4: Kayalli  1  0  3  4  
Family 5: Awad  1  0  2  3  
Family 6: Habib  5  3  3  11  
Total  14  7  13  34  
Percentage  41%  21%  38%  100%  

Table 7  
Number and Characteristics of the Artifacts  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Only English</th>
<th>Only Arabic</th>
<th>Both English and Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family 1: Al-Kateeb</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family 2: Jaara</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family 3: Hadad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family 4: Kayalli</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family 5: Awad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family 6: Habib</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from the tables show that most of the artifacts were drawings. Furthermore, the children wrote in English more than twice as often in these samples as
they wrote in Arabic. There were also fewer artifacts in which the children mixed
drawing and writing.

It seems that the children’s works are age appropriate. It is expected that young
children at this age are at the initial stages developing their literacy skills by
experimenting with letters and numbers and drawing inventively. These most basic
experimentations with the letters and numbers indicate that the children recognize
literacy skills and are proactively attempting to acquire them (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

The children’s works also show that children use both Arabic and English
alphabets in their writing, but employ them separately. One possible explanation for this
is that children recognize the difference between what is Arabic and what is English and
express that separation by keeping the words on separate pieces of paper. Even though
the parents speak to the children in a mix of Arabic and English, the children may
recognize that the writing they see in newspapers or in books is not mixed. They may be
beginning to understand that the formality of writing words on paper requires only one
language, but not both intermixed.

The children wrote more in English than in Arabic. This is likely because the
parents focused more on teaching their children how to write English, as that is the
language in which they will have to be proficient in for school. The same practice was
observed in a study by Reyes and Azuara (2008), where parents spoke to their children in
Spanish, but simultaneously emphasized writing and reading only in English.
Chapter Five

Results: Cross-case Analysis

The goal of this study was to achieve a better understanding of the experiences of Arab American children before they enter formal school through the examination of their home cultures and thereby assist teachers and educators in making decisions about the methods and programs they implement.

The following section presents the results of the study as they relate to the research regarding the nature of home environments in six Arab American families with 5 year old children in Northwest Ohio.

After reviewing the parents’ answers to the interview questions, and following Ying’s (2003) recommendation for data analysis procedures, I coded their answers according to specific topics and themes. I then did a cross-case study analysis, which included categorizing and summarizing the parents’ answers. I identified themes across these families and included details to provide the big picture of the children’s learning experiences at home. In this way, I identified six broad themes common of the children’s learning experiences among these families. These were, (a) Learning about language(s) and literacy, (b) learning about culture, (c) learning from parents, (d) learning from siblings, (e) the children’s self-learning and the time they spend at home, and (f) learning from the resources and materials available at home.

Based on these six themes, as well as what parents reported considering important for their children to learn at home before entering any formal school, I provide a detailed description of the children’s early home experiences.
Learning about Language(s) and Literacy

Language(s)

Results from the study revealed that young children learn two languages, Arabic and English. Despite my hearing the children mostly speak Arabic to their parents while I was visiting their homes, the parents stated that their children spoke English in the home a majority of the time. Only one parent said that they predominantly spoke Arabic because they had only been in the United States for two and a half years. Another parent, whose family has been in the United States for 19 years, stated that they made an effort to speak Arabic at home as a way to teach the children the language.

Furthermore, all parents stated that their children watch TV, and listen to music, songs, and the radio in both Arabic and English. One parent stated “my kids listen to both, but primarily English.” Another parents stated that his children watched movies and television shows in English 70 to 80 percent of the time, and the remaining time they watched shows in Arabic.

Literacy (reading and writing)

In reading and writing, the results indicated that young children try to read and write mostly in English, and very little in Arabic, before entering kindergarten. Although the children learn both English and Arabic alphabets and numbers, they spend more time practicing reading, writing, and speaking in the English form.

When asking parents about the language used by their children to read and write before entering kindergarten, some parents stated that their children can read and write in both Arabic and English before entering kindergarten. However, the parents differed in the type and the level of reading and writing they practiced at home. In one family, the
parents taught their children all of the English letters and numbers, but only some of the Arabic letters. Other parents made sure their children could read and write their names in English and Arabic. Still other parents did not take an active role in teaching their children how to read or write and the children only learned the English alphabet because that is what they were taught in their American day care center.

**Reading.** Parents mentioned that their children recognize some words from storybooks, and street signs, or they can read telephone numbers and recognize letters of both the Arabic and English alphabets.

Parents reported four reasons why their children were motivated to read before entering school. First, because it helps them play games. Second, because their siblings can do it and the younger children want to imitate them. Third, because they are just curious to discover new things. Fourth, because they found it entertaining to test their abilities and be recognized or praised by their parents for reading.

Some parents mentioned that their young children start learning how to read words and letters by using different materials parents provide for them, like audio books. One parent speculated that his four year-old child was not really reading, but memorizing the pictures and the sounds from the audio book and repeating them.

Another strategy other parents use to teach their kids how to read is by reading a short story to them and asking them to try to read some of the words. They sound out the word together until the child can read it.

**Writing.** Parents reported that their young children can write simple words like their names, names of relatives, address, and phone number in both English and Arabic.
Some parents stated that they helped their children learn how to write using books. Others encouraged their children to draw pictures first, and then showed them how to form letters. The parent would write the letter or word in English or Arabic and the child was encouraged to copy it. Some parents used workbooks designed for this type of activity and rewarded their children for writing in the workbook by purchasing new games and toys for them. Still others said that their children learned to write by imitating their older siblings who were already in school.

One mother mentioned that while her two kids can write their names and the entire alphabet in English, they only write some Arabic letters and cannot form words with the letters.

While young children learn about Arabic and English languages and how to read and write in both languages at home, the results also revealed that young children in all the families learn about their own culture. They learn family and cultural values, customs, religion, and norms like the Arabic greetings. Moreover, results show that all parents teach their children about their own culture; however, they differ in what aspects they believe are most important for their children to learn.

Learning about Culture

All parents stated that their children learn at home about their own culture, yet the parents differed in what they considered more important for their children to learn at early ages. Some stated learning religion was most important, others felt that the Arabic language was central to their culture, and still others put the strongest emphasis on social behaviors.
Some parents mentioned that they like their children to know where their family came from, the history, the culture, and the religion. They identified religion as the most important area for their children to learn about. They believe that the more their children know about religion, the better they know exactly about the history or the root of their culture and family. Additionally, religion served as a way to explain why the parents observed some traditions or practices. The parents believe that if the child knows about the religion, they can understand why the family does these things.

For those parents who considered religion as the first important thing they would like their young children to learn about, religion is regarded as the gateway through which all other aspects of the Arabic culture can be learned. The religion stresses an importance of respect for elders and provides guidelines for how to talk, pray, eat, and dress.

Instead of religion, some parents identified the Arabic language as the most important skill for children to learn. One parent stated that Arabic is what makes Arab culture different from other cultures. Another parent similarly stated that Arabic language was the most easily identifiable aspect of the Arabic culture.

In a family where the father is a native Arabic speaker and the mother is American, the father stated that he liked to use Arabic as a tool for privacy. The father could discipline his children in public using the Arabic language and the people around them would not understand. In this way, the father could avoid embarrassment both for himself and his children.

A mother who has two five year-old girls stated that the Arabic language was important for keeping the family unified. “Language is very important for them to learn
in order for them to communicate with other relatives who live overseas when they go for visiting.” The parents viewed speaking Arabic together as a way to show that they were part of the culture and that the culture was a part of their identity.

Apart from language and religion, some parents valued the children’s social skills as most important. These parents felt that it was most important for the child to learn how to respect adults, share with other children, obey rules, and practice good hygiene. They felt it was very important for children to know how to behave properly in public and in other people’s homes. These parents stated that teaching their children social skills built their children’s self-esteem and helped them be part of the Arabic culture.

Whether the most important area was religion, language, or social skills, all parents stated that the best way to teach these concepts was by setting an example and being a role model that their children would observe and want to imitate. One mother stressed that it was most important for her daughters to learn how to dress according to Muslim religious practices. She stated, “I will teach them how to wear, cover their head, cover everything except the face and the hands. I will show them pictures to let them know I’ll tell them ok, [you will dress] like me when you grow up, like your grandmother or your aunts.”

Although all of the parents stated that it was important for their children to learn about Arabic culture, all of the parents also expressed desire for their young children to learn and know about other cultures and to enjoy the advantages of other cultures. They want their children to meet people from other cultures and learn how to interact with them. They teach their children that they are not insulated from the rest of society and that they are part of the diversity of the United States. They encourage their children to
speak English and even explore other languages. One parent stated, “the world is full of many different cultures many different religions and if they know just one thing they won’t understand everything about the world around them.”

The parents believed it was important for their children to learn how to love learning, respect rules, share, be organized, be on time, be polite and courteous, care about the environment, and wear a seatbelt. They want their children to adopt the American value for independence and confidence. They encourage their children to ask for the reasoning behind rules or laws.

Parents also mentioned that it is important first that parents themselves should evaluate the advantages in other cultures according to their experiences and then teach or introduce it to their young children. One parent noted that he has adopted positive aspects of other cultures that are not prominent in Arabic culture. Another parent stated that he did not view one culture as better than another. He tried to emphasize the positive aspects of where the cultures overlapped.

**Learning from Parents**

The parents’ responses revealed that young children at home learn by engaging with their parents on a daily basis. However, the parents differed in the ways they engaged with their children. What follows is a description of the types of parent-child interaction.

**What parents teach their children**

Parents’ responses revealed that their young children learn about language, family and cultural values, religion, reading and writing, Arabic food, and the Arabic greeting
from them while at home. Parents also identified various strategies to enhance their children’s learning experiences at home.

**Language.** Parents stated that to develop language skills, they primarily talked with their children in both Arabic and English. They believe that by having conversations with their children, their children would learn how to use proper grammar and new vocabulary words. When children learn new words in English, the parents tell them how to say it in Arabic and vice versa. In this way the parents believe their children can develop proficiency in both languages at the same time.

To teach their children Arabic, the parents said they read short stories in Arabic. They would engage their child in the story by asking if they understood the story and all of the Arabic words. In addition, some parents said that they send their children to the mosque once a week to learn Arabic and the *Quran*.

Parents stated that they watch television with their children as a way to teach them language. The parents use flash cards and other educational toys as well. They stated that they would reward children for giving the correct answers. The parents also used small writing boards to write letters and words for children to copy. Then they would show the children their mistakes and show them how to copy the letters and words correctly.

One father mentioned that before his children go to bed he reads them stories from a book or tells them about his experiences in his home country. The father said that his children would ask him questions about Arabic words they did not understand and he would explain the word in English.

A mother stated that her husband always teaches the children Arabic and he focuses on it because his native language is Arabic. He reads the *Quran* to his children or
he engages them in conversations in Arabic. He also sits with his children and teaches them how to write Arabic words. He does these activities with his children every day when they are eating meals or watching television together as a family. If the children see an animal or an object on television, the father asks if they know what that word is in Arabic. Similarly, the mother of this family, whose native language is English, teaches the children in English. When the mother is reading to one of her children, if the child does not understand a word in English, she helps him to read the word and understand its meaning.

Another parent mentioned that she uses the internet to develop her children’s language skills in Arabic and English. The mother shows her children how to access to Arabic websites that have videos and songs that teach alphabets. The mother lets the children listen to the song and see the letters, and then tells them to repeat the songs or write the letters.

**Family Values.** Parents stated that they teach their young children about family values by talking with them. One parent said, “I think I will talk to them like make it as a story for example, wearing Al Hejab. I want them to learn that when they grow up it will be their choice, but I would like them to wear the Al-Hejab.”

Parents also stated that their children learn about family values by observing them. The children watch their parents greet other people and how they interact with people who visit the home and people they meet in public.

Additionally, parents use religious holidays, birthdays, and other celebrations as opportunities to teach their children about Arabic customs. These are times when the whole family is together and the children can learn from watching how all of their
relatives interact. The parents teach their children how to behave when they visit friends and show them what kinds of gifts are appropriate for the occasion. Parents said that through these events they can show their children how to talk, show good manners, and what to wear.

One father stated that he teaches his kids about the family values by being a good example for them to follow. He stated that because children regard their parents as the greatest people in the world, the parents should always be mindful of their own behaviors and never lie to their children.

Parents stated they also use the television to teach family values. If they are watching an Arabic television channel and it shows something related to Arabic culture they explain what it means. One parent stated that he uses what he sees on television to remind him of important values and he points them out to his children and talks to them about what they are watching. The father stated, “we show them on the TV, this is our culture, this is our country, this is what we are doing, this is our value.”

Another father stated that his kids can learn about what the family values by showing them what other families from the same culture also value. For example, he stated that he used to take his children to the houses of other relatives with children so that they could play together. The children learn how to greet each other, how to share games and toys, and how to get along with each other. Additionally, the father encourages his children to play with the American children in the neighborhood and attend their birthday parties.

One parent pointed out that there is no specific way to teach family values because it is in everyday life and in everything that occurs. The parent stated, “we
emphasize it on our kids in daily life, the method or our way of living at home that is part of our culture.” Another parent stated the same idea, that teaching family values occurs when getting up in the morning, and in what the family says and does throughout the day. Similarly, another parent said, “just everyday life, just the way we live our lives, seeing how we respect others, how we respect just at the family [level] how close we are together. Like just everyday life. There is not anything that we sit down and explain.”

**Religion.** The parents stated that they teach their young children about religion by letting their children pray when the parents pray. The parents also stated that they take their kids with them to the mosque every Friday. The parents asserted that at age 4 and 5, children are too young to understand the meaning or purpose of prayer. They do not know the words of the prayers. Even if the parents did teach them the prayers and explain what they mean, the parents did not believe that their children were old enough to appreciate the meaning. Parents said that they encourage their children to participate in prayers and fasting, but they do not enforce it. One parent mentioned that at the most he has taught his children what to say before and after eating a meal. Another parent stated that he teaches his children by answering their questions.

Aside from praying and answering questions, one parent stated that he teaches the children about religion based on the television shows they are watching together. He observed that his young children get bored of praying and he does not enforce them to pray because it is not required until the child is seven years old.

Some parents give their children examples from real life to encourage them to learn about their religion at early ages. One parent stated that he explained to his kids that when he works hard he gets money so he can buy food, a car, a house, and anything he
needs. Similarly, if anyone needs to go to heaven and wants God to help and listen to him, he should work hard to get this reward. He works hard by praying and reading the *Quran*. The parent also explained to his children that a part of religion is to help and to be a good example for others. The parent said that he teaches these manners or good behaviors to his kids, so now his children like to be helpful and pick up litter when they are walking.

The parent said, “I make him understand what is the meaning of religion through stories, how to pray when I pray. I read aloud and he repeats after that. When I take him to mosque, I tell him to sit down quietly. I read the *Quran* aloud and he repeats after me.” The parent mentioned that when he reads the *Quran* for his children, he teaches them how to repeat the verses. At the same time, he teaches them the meaning behind the verses. A mother also stated that she teaches religion using the same method. She reads *Quran* verses to her children and asks them to repeat the verse to her so that they can memorize the passages. She expressed hope that her children would learn about religion by watching her and adopting her practices.

Several parents stated that they teach religion throughout the routine of their day. The family prays together, reads the *Quran*, and recites small prayers before and after each meal. One parent asserted, “religion is a way of life so it is just things we can pick up throughout the day.” Another parent who also stated that she taught her children religion through daily life said she shows her children how to prepare for prayer by washing some parts of the body. Although the young children are not expected to fast, the older children are expected to do so, and the younger children learn about it by watching
their older siblings. The parent pointed out, “that is the way to build it up. It is not like a one-time shot—you do it and that’s it. It takes time, little by little.”

**Literacy (reading and writing).** Some parents considered teaching young children literacy skills before school a hard task. Many stated that at most they would teach their children letters, numbers, some words, and some names of objects and people. The parents stressed that they would teach these concepts only as a fun activity for their children.

One parent stated that she believed it was the role of school to teach literacy skills and that it was easier for children to learn how to read and write in school. She added that sometimes her younger children were curious and would ask questions about reading or how to add numbers and she would answer their questions. However, she did not expect her children to remember how to read or do arithmetic.

Another parent explained that she would play with modeling clay with her children and they would make shapes of animals and objects, or form letters with the clay, and she would teach the children the words of the objects they created. Aside from using clay, one parent read to her children from magazines and newspapers. She would tell the children to find the letters of their names in the headlines on the pages. She encouraged them to find ten or twenty letters and then reward them with candy or a trip to Chuckie Cheese restaurant. She stated that she has magazines and newspapers in the house that were mostly in English, with only a few in Arabic. In addition to modeling clay and print materials, one parent used flash cards to teach her children the alphabet.

Other parents stated that they sit with their kids and read aloud to them. While they are reading, the child will stop the parents and point to a letter they recognize as
being part of their name. They perform this activity with both Arabic and English books. Also while the parent reads to the child, the parent will stop and ask the child if he or she understands the meaning of a word or if the child can spell the word.

To encourage the child to practice writing, one parent stated that she writes words at the top of the paper and the child tries to copy the letters underneath. The parent recognized that the child might not read the word, but at least is practicing the action of writing.

Arabic Food. Food is one of the most immediate and ever-present ways to introduce children to Arabic culture. Parents stated that they teach their children the names of different foods, the ingredients, and the different religious rules regarding certain types of foods. Parents stated that there is no specific time for teaching about food and that it usually is discussed while the parents are preparing food or the children are eating a meal.

Some parents stated that they sometimes say the name of Arabic food in English to help the child know what it means. Young children also learn the names in Arabic because parents always say these names at home in Arabic, so by listening they learn the food names in Arabic. Additionally, young children learn about the Arabic names when parents ask the children to bring the food or when they tell them to come to eat. They identify the foods in Arabic and the children memorize those names from repeated use. Also, one parent said that his young children learn about Arabic food when the family eats at an Arabic restaurant. He said, “they know how to distinguish about Arabic food and other food inside and outside home.”
Another parent mentioned that her young children learn about Arabic food when they help her cook and prepare food for a meal. She did not specifically tell the child what the word is, she just uses it and they learn by observing and imitating her. She stated that just by helping her around the kitchen they learn new words in Arabic and English.

One parent said that his young children learn about Arabic food when they go overseas for visiting. Another example is that young children learn about Arabic food from their grandmother, who lives in the home with the family and spends the most time with the children. She only speaks Arabic, so the children learn the Arabic word for foods from her.

**Arabic Greeting.** Parents considered it important for their young children to learn about the Arabic greeting. They believed it helped them make friends and show respect for adults. Parents stated that they teach their children the Arabic greeting by greeting them that way and telling them how they should respond. The children hear the greeting on a consistent basis and learn that this is the polite way to greet everyone the child meets.

One parent explained, “in our religion when you enter any place and you have a group of people you have to say (السلام عليكم – “Alslam Alikom”), which means hi, or (“Marhaba,” مرحبأ which also means hi. Whenever I arrive home, I always say السلام عليكم) (صلاة عليكم). My kids just memorize these words. And sometimes I just come to them and shake their hand and say (السلام عليكم – Alslam Alikom).” The parent said that by making the greeting a habit, the children learn it.
Similarly, another parent said, “we teach our children that if anybody knocks [on] the door it doesn’t matter from inside or outside the house, they should say (السلام عليكم) Alslam Alikom).”

Young children learn the Arabic greeting not only from hearing their parents using it, but also their other family members and other relatives when they visit. Hearing it from everyone reinforces that it is an important greeting to remember.

While parents are the main resource to teach children about different aspects of their home culture and values, results show that siblings also play an integral role in early childhood development.

**Learning from Siblings**

All parents of the six families mentioned that young children also learn much from their older siblings. Results show that young children at home learn from their sibling about how to play games, fix toys, love school and learning, read and write, do chores, share, and behave with others.

The younger children see their older siblings coming home from school and doing homework, so they sit next to their sibling and write or draw and pretend they are doing homework too. They are always asking each other for help on preparing food, cleaning their rooms, doing chores, or fixing their bicycles. They ask their siblings how to write words or how to read words or how to color pictures. They imitate their older siblings’ facial expressions phrases and behaviors. They ask their older siblings the meaning of Arabic words they hear on television.

One parent stated that his younger kids listen to the older kids and they feel good when the older kids show them how to do something. They like the attention from their
older siblings. He said, “the older kids teach better than us because they understand from their brothers more than from us, they get their own ways.”

The parents encourage their older children to take on the responsibility to teach their younger siblings by giving them rewards and gifts as appreciation for helping each other out. One parent admitted, “the more important really you just teach the oldest son about the value and rules the younger will be follow that one because he is very close to him. He listens from him more than me. The young kid [is] always looking to his big brother as a good example. He considered him as the one who is good, strong, and not make mistakes.” Similarly, a mother mentioned that the younger children love to listen to the older kids because they admire them and enjoy being around them.

In addition to learning from parents and siblings, results from the parents’ answers show that the children are naturally curious and love to independently explore their home environment. In this way, the children learn from their own initiative and discovery.

**Children’s Self-Learning**

The parents reported that their young children can learn and do many things by themselves. Parents mentioned that they help and encourage their young children and show them the way they should do things, and after that, the children will independently do these things. For example, the children will fix their toys, play games, organize their stuff and put it away when they are finished using it. They know how to operate the television and change the channels. They can serve themselves and make their own sandwiches or pour their own drinks. The children know how to make their beds, brush their teeth, get dressed, and use a vacuum cleaner.
Aside from learning from parents how to be autonomous, one parent mentioned that her younger daughter has older brothers and sisters and she learns how to do things by observing them and then imitating their actions on her own. Conversely, parents stated that their young children cannot do some things by themselves at home and they need assistance from their parents. Children need help operating the computer, using drawing and writing tools, learning how to play sports like soccer and basketball, tying their shoes, and fixing their bicycles.

The parents stated that children sometimes can do things by themselves, but sometimes parents do not allow them to do so because they are afraid that it is too dangerous and the children could hurt themselves. The parents prefer that they teach the child the right and wrong way to perform a task so that the child knows the right way to do something. An example of this is using the kitchen. One parent mentioned that sometimes his young children need help in preparing foods, such as making toast in the toaster or heating up food in the microwave. They also need help carrying heavy food items because they are not strong enough to lift heavy dishes. Another example is teaching children acceptable social and religious skills. One parent stated that he teaches his children prayers and how to read the Quran. Another parent stated that she teaches her child how to properly greet adults who are strangers.

The frequency with which children independently explore or teach themselves new skills verses the frequency with which they ask for help may be an indicator of their level of self-reliance or dependence on their parents. The parents mentioned that each of their children has different needs and personalities. Sometimes it is hard to determine if a child is dependent or independent because the child might be dependent in one area and
independent in another area. For example, some young children sometimes ask their mothers to get food for them even though they know how to get it for themselves. On the other hand, some children try to get their own food and will not ask for help if an item is too high to reach or too heavy or hot to carry.

The parents stated that while it can depend on the area, it can also depend on the child’s mood. The child may feel too lazy to help himself, or feel frustrated because the parent is doing a task for him when he wants to do it himself. One parent thought that his child was more dependent because the child was afraid of doing it wrong, breaking something, and get blamed or punished for it. Another parent thought that her child asked for help because the child thought it was a way for the parent to show love and to make the child feel like the parent cared for him. Some parents mentioned that their children will ask their parents to show them how to write new words that they have just learned, or they ask what a word says and want to learn how to read it for themselves.

In sum, all parents agreed that their young children are both dependent and independent, depending on the situation, the children’s moods and the children’s personality.

Whether predominantly independent or dependent, results revealed that all the young children are curious about their environments and are interested to learn. While results show that the young children are curious to learn and explore by themselves, the level of curiosity depends on what they are interested in. Many of the children enjoyed building with Legos or setting tracks for a toy train. One parent stated that his child likes to watch him run the lawn mower. Some parents also mentioned that their children test their abilities to draw objects or write words. The parents said that their children ask them
all the time how to spell words so that the children can practice writing the words. Other parents mentioned that their young children use the internet to find pictures of cars or animals. One parent stated that his child always asks him how to spell words, like car or dog, and then the child uses the keyboard to spell the word on the computer and searches for pictures of these words.

Moreover, some parents mentioned that the more objects they provided to the child, the more curious the child was to explore the new objects. One parent stated that when his children use the computer to play simple math games, they try to solve the problems by themselves, but if they cannot come up with the answer they will ask the parent.

Another parent said that her child’s curiosity was influenced by watching her older siblings. She would try to play games that her older siblings played on the computer. She would pick up books that her older siblings read and even though the younger child could not read yet, she would look at the pictures and make up her own stories. Another parent stated that her younger children always look at books, even though they cannot read them yet. She observed that her young children will pick up books and carry them around with them, and that her 5 year old daughter follows her around and watches everything she does.

In addition to parents, siblings, and themselves, results revealed children also learn from the different resources and materials parents make available for them at home.

**Learning from the Resources and Materials Available at Home**

When asking the parents about the learning resources available for their young children, parents listed television, computers, internet, and books in English and Arabic
as the primary resources. In addition to these resources, parents mentioned that they provide their children with other materials to help them learn such as audio books, workbooks, and word games.

One parent mentioned that these resources help, but not too much and that the parents’ roles are more important than these resources. Many parents repeated this belief, stating that parents were the best resource for teaching right and wrong, social skills, healthy eating habits, and about the world around them.

Another parent stated that the more resources (e.g., TV, computer, internet, books, game etc) that children have access to, the more they will learn. The parent said, “kids say words you don’t even know because they watch TV.”

In addition to the resources available for young children at home or the different materials parents provide their children with at home, parents also encourage their young children to borrow books from the library. The parents said that this was how they encouraged their children to love reading. One parent stated that he used to buy pictures books and short stories not only to let his children read and prepare them for school but also to show his children that he valued books and loved reading. He hoped that his children would want to imitate his love for reading books.

Similarly, other parents mentioned that they hoped their children learned by observing the actions of the parents, such as when they did house chores or yard work. They also considered the children’s experiences playing in the yard or riding their bicycles in the neighborhood as good activities for learning about their surroundings and their abilities.
Some parents not only provide these materials (e.g., games, books, etc.) but they also actively engage in using these materials with their children to promote learning experiences. One parent stated, “I have, for instance, one of the games they plug into the computer and get little letters and it tells you spell this letter and if something is wrong it tells you…she has plenty of workbooks. I sit down and I go through them.”

Furthermore, parents mentioned many examples of the knowledge and skills their young children acquire by using the resources available for them at home. For example, parents stated that their children can learn the alphabets from the television, the computer, and from educational DVDs or CDs or sound toys. One parent stated that her son learns Arabic and English from watching television shows. Another parent stated that her family used video chat on the internet to talk with family overseas and that her children spoke to their relatives in Arabic.

Parents mentioned that their young children learn how to operate the computer, for example how to turn it on or off, and how to select the program or game they want to play. The parents observed that even though the child could not read, the child recognized the computer icons and knew what they represented.

One parent mentioned that the way his young children learned was by listening to and imitating the characters they view on television, both in how the character acted and the words or phrases the character used. Another parent stated that the way his young children learn is by asking questions when watching TV programs, particularly when they hear a word in English or Arabic that they do not recognize.

One parent discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the learning resources in the home. The parent thought watching television was a good way for the child to learn
about the world. He also thought that while playing games on the computer could be good for entertaining his children, he worried that it was also wasting time.

A parent observed that her child learned from resources because the parent was with her child while the child was using the resource. She explained, “I sit with her and I do work with her even before school she would sit and watch Sesame Street, for example, she would count numbers. She can count all the way up to ten. Why? Because we either sit with her or she sees it on the television—she just keeps repeating what things she hears. From the computer, there are games that we install on the computer for them. There is math, there is reading, and there is language, a lot of different things. Most of them are games, but educational. They teach them the different things they need to learn. They go by the age group so I have different games for each individual on the computer.”

While all parents are engaged in their children’s learning and provide many resources from which to learn, the parents’ responses to the interview questions also revealed that they have different opinions about what they consider most important for their children to learn before entering school. The parents’ responses also indicate that they have differing views on their roles and the factors that hinder them from teaching their children certain skills or concepts before they enter school.

What Parents Consider Important for Young Children to Learn at Home

When asking the parents about the things they believe are important for their young children to learn at home before entering school, all parents agreed that adaptation was most important. They emphasized teaching their children how to adapt to new environments so that they are not shocked or shy about school. They thought it was
important to teach their children how to make friends, respect and listen to teachers, learn how to ask permission, and how to use the bathroom.

One parent mentioned that the things that are important for his children to know before entering school are how to be clean, friendly, and polite. One mother pointed out that if the child did not know how to behave properly, then the child could not learn from the teacher or get along with classmates. She stated, “if they go into the school and their behavior is all over the place, they cannot focus on what is going on in the school.”

One father did not want her child to be shy or afraid of making friends, so he thought it was important that the child learn how to interact with other children. Moreover, if the child was hurt or needed help, the father wanted the child to know how to speak to the teacher and not be afraid. The father gave an example of what he told his young child, “we are not with you, me and your mom, so if you need anything, you have to ask your teachers. This is very important. Your teacher is like your mom. You can ask her anything you want.” In this way, the father hoped to make the child feel comfortable with the teacher.

Another parent mentioned that he took his child to the school to visit before enrolling him so that he could show the child what the school looked like. He told his son, “this will be your second home.” By doing this the parent said that he felt his son would be prepared for his first day of school.

Additionally, some parents considered learning the basics of reading and writing, such as alphabet and numbers, their names, telephone numbers, and addresses, were also important to know before entering school for the first time.
Parents’ Views about Languages

When asking parents about the most important languages for their young children to learn, some parents had a more formed opinion and could state why one language is more preferable than the other. One parent asserted:

“Arabic is most important. The reason is because I have four kids overseas so for my kids who live in the U. S. to understand their brothers and sisters overseas they have to learn Arabic, because my kids in the U. S. ask me about how they can understand their brothers and sisters when we go overseas for visiting. Also Arabic for our religion, Quran, I speak Arabic, my mom speaks Arabic, my family speaks Arabic.”

Several parents’ reasons were because they viewed Arabic as more difficult to learn than English. They felt that by living in the United States, English would be very easy for their children to learn. However, because the children are not exposed to Arabic language outside the home, these parents felt it was important to focus on speaking Arabic in the home in addition to English.

Most parents considered both as equally important to learn. One parent explained that English was important for his children to learn because “they are part of American society,” and Arabic was important to learn because “we come from there I want them to know some of our heritage, some of our history, some of our roots, their roots” Another parent recognized that while English was important for their children to succeed in school, “they have to know how to communicate with their relatives when we go visiting to Jordan.” It was most of the parents’ desire that their child be able to communicate well in both Arabic and English.
Parents’ Views about Teaching Literacy

The parents reported that the reading and writing their young children learn before entering school is important, but they differed in their reasons why. For example, some parents stated that basic literacy skills prepare their children for what they will learn in school. The children will understand the teacher and not struggle with assignments. They will already be familiar with the letters and the exercise of writing them or reading them. Moreover, it will make the task easier for teachers. A parent whose child was entering an Islamic school stated that reading Arabic would help the child read the Quran when he prayed.

Meanwhile, other parents stated that while they did consider basic literacy important, they did not take an active role in trying to teach those skills to their children before they entered school. One parent said he did not require his children to learn how to read and write, but only mildly encouraged them. Another parent stated, “we give more freedom to do what he needs…let him describe what he wants, you cannot enforce him to learn some words, but you can give him all options by encouraging him…if he loves that one he will come to you and ask you about it.”

Parents’ Views about Family Values

When asked which family values parents considered most important for their young children to learn, the first response parents gave was for their children to respect parents and all adult relatives, as well as neighbors and friends. The parents taught their children how to behave in public. They also stated that they teach their children how to love and how to help others. One parent stated that she taught her children to give help to others because then when the child needs help others will also help him. Other parents
considered the family values they need their young children to learn are honesty, generosity, helpfulness, and self-confidence. Conversely, another parent stated that it is too early for young children to learn about family values. This parent stressed that values were taught by the parents setting a good example and not by lecturing the child. Moreover, the child was not expected to honor family values until the child was seven years old. The parent believed that this was the age when the child’s character is complete and the child can understand the importance of honoring values.

The parents felt that they must cooperate with the school and reinforce the values that their children learned at school. The parents viewed their role as supplementary, teaching their children any of the values that school did not already teach them. An example of supplementary teaching is the parents teaching their children about religious values. One parent stated that he taught his young children how to pray at specific times as scheduled by the Muslim religion. A mother stated that she taught her children modesty by making sure they only wore clothing that covered their legs past their knees. The mother noted that even though the family valued modesty, as dictated by their religion, her daughter still enjoyed swimming.

Parents’ Views about their Roles

When asking parents about their role in preparing their young children to school, all parents agreed that they play an important role. Some parents stated that their role is to explain to their kids that school is good and that education and life goals are important to have. One parent stated that the most important thing in preparing the kid before entering school is to take the child to school for a visit before classes begin so that the child can know what the school looks like and what his classroom will look like. This way, the
child will not be as overwhelmed when he starts his first day of school. The parents felt it was very important to encourage the child to enter the new environment, meet new friends, and not be afraid.

Another parent mentioned that the best way to prepare kids for school is by talking with them about school showing them and how to listen to teachers and how to be polite. She teaches her children to be tidy and not make a mess on their clothing when they eat. She emphasizes the importance of being friendly to their classmates. The parent added that it would be helpful if the teacher told her what the teacher expects the child to know before entering school so that the parent can prepare her children.

Other parents considered their roles as minimal in preparing their young children for school. They believed they only needed to teach their children the most basic concepts, such as the alphabet, writing their names, and learning their numbers. They would teach their children how to behave, be truthful, be organized, and be clean. They would make sure their children could use the bathroom, wash their hands, feed themselves, share with other children, and express themselves using words so that others could understand what they are thinking and feeling. The parents would talk to their children about what situations they might experience in school and how to act appropriately in that situation if it occurred. They assumed that it was the school’s job to teach academic knowledge and skills to their children. As one parent stated, “I am the example for them, I am showing them what is right and wrong, so I have a major role. I keep them interested in school by being involved in what is happening at the school.” The parent believed her role was to teach the child social skills and good behavior more than academic skills beyond the basics.
Meanwhile, another parent stated that her role is to read stories to her children and give them small assignments. She would reward the children for completing the assignment. She also taught her children how to operate an alarm clock and used it so that the children would become accustomed to waking up early to the alarm.

**Parents’ Views about the Factors that Hinder them from Teaching their Children**

Some parents mentioned that there are some factors that could hinder them from teaching or preparing their young children for school. Whereas, some stated that nothing can stop them from teaching their young children and preparing them for school.

Those parents who mentioned that there are factors that can prevent them from teaching their young children identified time as an issue. They expressed regret that there was not enough time for them to sit with their children and teach them basic math and literacy skills. Parents stated that sometimes lack of time is an issue because the parents are working or in school and must use their spare time to cook or clean the house.

Moreover, one parent said he sometimes had trouble dividing his time and attention between all of his children. He stated, “sometimes, me and my wife, we feel bad because we do not give him enough time, the time is a big issue here because we are busy with some other sibling.” Some other parents stated similar regrets about spending more time with school aged children helping them with homework, and not having time to teach their younger children. In addition to the issue of time, some parents believe that their value system may be a hindering factor for preparing their children for school.

In contrast, one family had a very different approach. The parent stated that there were no obstacles because he believes it was not important to teach the basics in reading, writing or math to very young children. The parent believes that it is more important to
give his children freedom and allow them to independently explore what interests them. He believes that his children can learn naturally by themselves through their own observations and environments. He feels that his role and his wife’s role in teaching children only become important once the child has already entered school. At that time, he would follow up with their kids and supplement their school learning with lessons about social skills or goal setting.

Another parent stated there were no obstacles because he made an effort to teach his children what they needed to know. He would not allow any obstacles to prevent him from teaching his children. He stated “you have to spend time with kids as you spend time in work.” He made sure he always had time for teaching his children. A third parent also agreed, saying “I don’t see anything that would be stop me from teaching her.”

**Summary**

In sum, the parents’ responses characterize the general big picture of children’s learning experiences in an Arab American home environment. The children in these homes learn about Arabic language, religion, and culture, which include values, customs, beliefs, and even food and formal greetings. The parents’ responses to the interview questions demonstrate how integral their roles are as parents in preparing their young children socially, emotionally, and academically for entering school. Parents recognize the importance of setting good examples for their children to follow and providing support for their children by engaging with them and providing other resources and materials that help them learn.
Chapter Six

Discussion, Limitations, Conclusion, Suggestions for Future Research, and Recommendations

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to describe the nature of the home environments in six Arab American families with 5 year-old children in Northwest Ohio region of the United States of America, as well as to (a) examine what practices (e.g., read for the child) parents employed to provide learning experiences for their children and what types of materials/objects they provide for their children; and (b) describe how parents in the case study families characterize their roles as well as schools’ roles in teaching their children.

The findings revealed that parents encourage and focus on teaching their children two languages—Arabic and English. In general in Arab American homes, young children are equally exposed to the two languages. Most children learn Arabic from their parents, grandparents, and other relatives who spend time within the child’s home. These frequent interactions with relatives in the home enforce and encourage the use of Arabic language. Additionally, young children learn Arabic from other resources such as Arabic television channels, books, music CDs, and DVDs. Children learn English from different resources available at home such as television, computer, internet, CDs, DVDs, books, games and toys.

Arab American families in these case studies have the expectation that their children learn both Arabic and English. They value Arabic as part of their culture and a
way to maintain the family’s collective identity. They value English as a way to navigate school and become successful in American society.

Evidence from research also shows that families value bilingual skills in their children as a way to preserve heritage and native culture while still integrating with the host culture. Children are able to communicate with relatives who do not speak English. Their bilingual abilities are marketable in the diverse American workforce (Bialystok, 2001; King & Mackey, 2007; Rodriguez, 2010; Yoshida, 2008).

Although parents consider both Arabic and English important for their young children to learn, some parents also believe that learning Arabic in the home is more important than learning English. Parents in Jaara’s family stated that this is because Arabic is too complicated to learn later in life. The father said, “English [does] not need that long time to learn, but I believe that our language, I mean the Arabic language, is more complicated and very important to my child to learn when he is young.” Moreover, the parents view speaking Arabic as a central part of preserving their native culture.

However, if Arab American parents value raising their children bilingually, then they must focus on teaching both languages equally. If they only focus on teaching Arabic within the home, then English language skills must be supported outside the home (Genesee, 2008). Parents can accomplish this by sending their children to American day care facilities where only English is spoken.

In their approach to teaching their children both languages, Arab American parents tend to speak to their children in Arabic and encourage reading and writing skills in English. They show their children how to read and write their names, parents’ names, home phone numbers, and home addresses in English. However, they converse daily with
their children in Arabic. This is likely because they feel children will primarily need English reading and writing skills in school, and will need Arabic speaking skills to easily communicate with family. The study also revealed that parents utilize Arabic speaking skills as tool for privacy, speaking to their children in Arabic while in the company of non-Arabic speakers.

The research focuses on who is available at home to teach children, and who might affect his/her learning experiences. Results show that mothers are most available and the one most likely to teach children basic literacy skills. However, parents also asserted that they share the responsibilities of teaching children and regard their children’s development as the highest priority.

While three of the Arab American parents in this study hold their child’s development in the highest regard, they also feel that the school environment is better than the home environment as a place for academic development to occur. It is not their economic status that prevents parents from providing learning materials, nor are parents lacking in their ability to teach their young children. Instead, it is the parents’ belief that the school can teach their young children basic knowledge and skills, specifically the language, better than parents can. As one parent noted, “It is easier that children learn the reading and writing from school, the role of the school is more important than us to teach them about the language.” It seems that Arab American parents trust the American schools to teach certain kinds of skills more effectively than the parent could teach at home. This may be because parents think the teachers have different strategies and know how and what to teach. They view the teachers as the professionals in this area.
One research finding from the interviews with parents is that Arab American children are curious and are motivated to learn. Parents provide games, toys, books, DVDs and CDs for their children and reward their children for learning new things. The materials and rewards also motivate the children. It appears that parents provide an environment that encourages the child to learn and explore.

In other studies it has been found that children learn language primarily through interactions, observations, and imitations of language used by family members. Having relatives around the home environment speaking Arabic to the child is the main resource for the child to learn Arabic. The foundation of children’s literacy and language skills is laid by the encounters the child has with other people in the home (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978).

In particular, Vygotsky's theory of human development showcases the importance of social interactions in developing language (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1962) young children develop language skills through daily interactions with other children and adults. Moreover, the way a child learns to write a language reflects the culture in which the child is being raised (Moll, Saez, & Dworin, 2001).

Parents and siblings are the most important resource for children to use when learning language and developing literacy skills. They play an even more critical role in the child’s development of bilingual skills. Social contexts teach the bilingual child how to think independently in two languages (Moll, 1990; Rogoff, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Furthermore, the child relies on feedback from their parents, siblings, and other early social encounters to make sense of print languages and distinguish between two different types of print languages (Tolchinsky, 2003).
Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) explored language socialization and verified the critical importance of learning language fluency through social interaction. Even babies rely primarily on social interaction to develop language skills (Kuhl & Rivera-Gaxiola, 2008). It was found that babies learned language only through book reading and play with native speakers, and not through television or audio exposure to the same language. As children age, they continue to develop literacy skills most easily through daily interactions with family (Taylor, 1983).

In this case study, parents stated that their young children learned reading and writing skills more from their siblings, because they interact the most with their siblings. The younger children were motivated to learn the language skills because their older siblings had those skills.

The quality and quantity of social interaction also plays a role in a child’s early development of literacy and language. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) found that high quality and frequent interaction with parents made children more likely to develop language proficiency.

This study revealed that parents speak Arabic when they talk with each other and Arabic and English when they talk with their children. This indicates that parents realize that their children should learn English in order to integrate into American society and learn Arabic as part of their cultural identity.

The findings also revealed that children learn about their culture the way they learn about their language—by observing and imitating the parents’ behaviors actions in everyday life. In this way, children learn about the values and customs. For example, it is
okay for girls and boys to swim, but girls must wear more modest clothing than other American girls may wear.

The parents reference their culture as a reminder of their origins. They believe that they are Arab wherever they live and the language, customs, and religion will be the same regardless of their host society. Their culture influences all aspects of their daily life and is not taught as a subject matter in specific time and place like it would be in school. Children learn the culture by imitating their parents.

When an aspect of the host culture does not conflict with Arab values, the Arab families accept it and teach their children those values. For example, the Arab American parents want their children to learn English. The parents know that learning English is important for navigating American society. Children need to learn English in order to be successful in American schools. They need it in order to understand the television shows they watch and the internet games they play or to communicate with American children they meet. Because of this, parents introduce English to their children in the home and make it the primary language the closer the child is to entering school.

The parents who voiced this idea did not provide an example of the opposite—how they respond when an aspect of the host culture does conflict with Arab values. I know from my own background that dating begins at a younger age in American culture than it does in Arab culture, and that this is potentially a source of conflict between the two cultures.

The Arab American parents emphasize the good aspects of the Arab culture and the American culture. They encourage their children to find the differences and view the differences positively. If children are only exposed to Arabic language and culture in
their home, then when they enter school they will not be prepared for the differences in their host culture and might not be able to adapt in school. The Arab American parents I interviewed recognize that their children follow their example in learning how to behave, and they make an effort to act as a role model. The parents accept the parts of the American host culture that they hope their children will imitate and accept as well. The parents believe that the more their children know about the family religion, then the better they will understand the history of their culture. Parents use religion as an explanation for why the parents behave, talk, and dress the way that they do.

Except for Jaara’s family, which reported that children were too young for rules, in general the parents use rules and values to control the children’s behaviors. They do not offer explanations or reasoning for why the child is expected to behave a certain way. They expect their children to follow the rules without questioning it. For example, the parents do not explain to their children that they should wear their seatbelts because it keeps them safe. The children know they must perform these actions, but they do not know why.

Even when parents need to control or enforce the rules and values they believe are important for their children, it seems that parents do not use physical punishment or blaming. Instead, some parents use positive reinforcement. They give rewards to their children if their children follow the rules. Some parents take away a video game or will not allow the child to go places. Nevertheless, the parents never explain why the rule must be followed. As some researchers have suggested, parents may not offer reasoning because parents themselves were raised in the same manner (Abudabbeh, 1996; Dwairy,Achoui, Abouerice, Farah, Sakhleh, Fayad, & Khan, 2006). Moreover, from my
own childhood experiences, I know that Arab children’s obedience to rules is a way to show respect and loyalty to the parents.

Despite the expectation of strict obedience, the study revealed that the Arab American parenting style in all six of case studies is not “authoritarian.” The parents use words of encouragement, provide rewards for following rules, and give their children freedom to explore whatever they found interesting. The parents strongly encouraged their children to accept the family religion, but did not force their children to accept it. One explanation is that all the parents in these six cases are educated and living in the United States. They might recognize the importance of raising children that are independent and can easily adapt in American society. Most parents emphasized that their young children must be free to learn how to learn and must learn how to trust themselves instead of depending on their parents to be told what to do.

The case study parents also mentioned many examples of how they maintain a good relationship with their children. They tell their young children stories, play games with them, listen to them, answer their questions, and give them toys to enhance their learning experiences.

Although parents encourage their young children to be independent, they are very strict about safety. They expect children to ask permission before they do anything that could be potentially dangerous. This may be detrimental to the emphasis on independence. Instead of showing a child how to do things safely for themselves, the parents prefer to do it for the child. If children must get permission all the time, this could negatively affect their self-confidence. They may be reluctant to try new things because they have become dependent on someone else taking the risk for them.
Another finding revealed that parents provide their children with an abundance of learning resources. The children have televisions, computers, books, games, toys, and drawing materials. They have playrooms and backyards to run around in. They are involved in activities like swimming. What differentiates these homes from other American homes is that the materials are in both Arabic and English. Children watch television in both languages and play internet games in both languages.

Despite providing their children with all of these materials, all of the parents recognized that parent child interaction is still the primary source for learning. They also acknowledged that how the materials were used was just as important. The parents chose materials that were specifically for educational purposes. It could be that because the parents are educated, they are aware of what is most beneficial for their children to learn. Parents restricted what television channels the children watched and what internet sites the children visited. They were aware of the drawbacks of these resources for learning and made a purposeful effort to control the resources. The parents were sensitive to the different development stages of each child and how each learning resource could be used by each child.

A particularly noteworthy finding from this study is that parents claim their younger children learn many things from their siblings. They learn Arabic and English, how to read and write the letters of their names, how to play computer games, what the family rules are, and how to fix things. The older siblings also influence the younger children’s perception of school. The younger children see their older siblings preparing for school and want to imitate them.
Younger children learn more from their siblings than from their parents perhaps because they have close bonds with their siblings and interact with them more frequently through play. The younger children may view anything the older siblings do as fun. Some parents stated that the older children would read stories to the younger children or teach them new words from both English and Arabic. Perhaps the older children did this so that they could more easily communicate with their siblings. Another possible explanation is that young children are curious to imitate their siblings because what they are doing looks like fun.

The parents seem to understand their children. They observe that their children learn the most from their siblings. They encourage their children to learn and explore the world around them. They reward their children for good behaviors by giving them praise, buying games and toys, and taking them to visit friends and relatives.

In all of the case study families, the mothers teach the children more often than the fathers do. This is because the mothers are available most of the time at home, as stated by the parents during the interviews, and they have more opportunities to interact with their children. When both parents are home, they equally share the responsibility of teaching the children. The mothers do not have a structured time or planned subject matter to teach their children. Instead, they teach their children when they have free time and what the child learns depends on the situation.

Conversely, the sub-populations in other studies had different results. Zaman (2006) found that fathers in low-income Hispanic families were more aware than the mothers of their children’s skills and were more interested in their children’s learning. The present case study is different in that both parents are educated and conscientious of
teaching their children. Mothers are more engaged in teaching children because they are home more often.

Overall, analysis of the parents’ responses showed that parents do not view their roles as teachers, nor do they only emphasize teaching skills that will be needed for school. Instead, parents define their role as helping their children develop socially, rather than academically. They emphasize preparing their children to adapt socially to the school environment, and all social situations outside the home. They teach their children how to respect their teachers, the importance of obeying the rules, how and when to give the Arabic greeting, and how to overcome the fear of meeting new friends. The parents regard these skills as equally important as academic skills. For example, the father in the Jaara family accompanied his child to school on the first day to show him his classroom and introduce him to his teacher and classmates. It seems the father realized that his child might not readily adapt to the new school environment and was there to help the transition.

Despite having stated in their interviews that they provide educational materials to their children and interact with them to teach them basic literacy and mathematic concepts, it seems that the parents do not make a conscientious or consistent effort to do so. Instead, the academic preparation occurs informally in a variety of ways throughout the day. The parents perceive these actions as part of daily living.

The reason may be that parents feel that young children should spend most of their time playing. Or, it may be that parents do not think of themselves as teachers or their children as students. When it comes to academic preparations, parents only mentioned teaching basics, like the English and Arabic alphabets and numbers. One
explanation is that parents could expect that the school will teach these academic skills better than the parents could. Regardless of the parents’ focus on social and emotional aspects over academic ones, it is likely any attention to their children’s development improves the children’s chance for success in school. Rollins and Thomas (1979) observed that parental support increases cognitive and social functioning in children.

Parents stated that they do not have enough time to devote to their children, both because of work obligations and because they have many children between which to divide their time. Parents expressed guilt for feeling like they could not give more time to their children. This guilt shows that parents are aware of their children’s need for interactions with them. It also shows that parents try to give as much time as possible to their children.

As for how children use their time, the study revealed that young children play more than they engage in academic pursuits. They have access to many different materials that parents provide for them at home such as books, DVDs, and CDs. However the children do not use these materials very much. One possible explanation is that the children require help from their parents to learn anything from the materials. Instead, the children spend their time watching cartoons, playing video games, or drawing.

The children do not have a daily schedule for how to spend time at home. Parents do not have a specific list of skills that they want to teach their children. New knowledge and skills are acquired by the children as the situation to learn arises.

Throughout many other studies, the amount of time parents spend with their children is found to be important in affecting the child’s literacy skills. Snow, Burns, and
Griffin (1998) found a strong and positive relationship between the amount of time a child talked with a parent or adult and later literacy skills. This means that the more the parents talk and communicate with their children, the more they develop their language skills. De Vries (2007) conducted a study to explore the effects of musical practices at home on children under the age of five and why not all parents engaged in musical practices. Results showed that parents stated that they lacked the time to engage in regular music making with young children, even though music making is found to enhance a child’s cognitive development.

In addition to time, another factor is who the children interacted with at home. In homes where grandparents were present, young children spent a majority of their time interacting with them. In homes where only parents were available, young children interacted most with their mothers, then with other siblings, and last with their fathers. The parents indicated that this was because the father was not present for the amount of time that the mother and siblings were present in the home. Who the child interacts with most seems to depend on who is available most of the time. Moreover, what the child learns depends on the knowledge base of the person with whom the child is interacting. For example, a child interacting with a grandparent who speaks Arabic to the child will likely learn Arabic faster. A child interacting with a sibling who plays video games will likely learn how to play video games. The child’s learning experiences depend on who is available and what they provide for the child to learn.

The parents stated many different skills as important for the child to learn before entering school. However, the parents all considered the most important skill to be able to adapt to school. They stated that they considered a well-adjusted to be child one
who respected their teachers and friends, followed the rules, and was not shy. The parents were aware that their children could struggle or not succeed if the parents did not prepare their children to act in socially acceptable ways.

Both recent immigrant parents and parents that have lived in the United States for 20 years believed that of all the skills a child could learn before entering school, academic skills were the lowest priority. A possible explanation is that these parents trust American schools to teach academic skills. Also, parents do not have enough time to teach these types of skills. Parents believe their role is to prepare their children socially so that the child can adapt to the new environment. Another possible explanation is that parents believe without the social skills, children cannot advance to academic skills. For example, the mother in Awad’s family stated that she believes that a lack of social skills would prevent her child from learning. She said, “If the kids don’t behave well and if they go into the school and their behavior is over all over the place, they cannot be able to focus on what is going on in the school.”

As for the children, the study revealed that they are curious and love to explore and learn. However, they are most interested in learning in ways that will entertain, such as playing computer games. The children learn for fun, or to test their abilities. The finding is consistent with what research shows about the inherent curious nature of children. According to Piaget, (1970), children learn and explore things by themselves through play and when they practice different activities. He emphasized that children learn by themselves when they are allowed to make mistakes (1973). Active learning takes place when the child’s curiosity is encouraged and the child makes his or her own discoveries (Gelman & Baillargeon, 1983).
All of the families reported that they have an income level within the range of $20,000 to $35,000 per year. Nevertheless, the parents provided many different types of materials for their children. The parents also stated that they were aware of which materials would enhance their children’s learning experiences. As such, the parents provided an equal amount of different objects, games, and toys for their children. They realized that their children need academic materials as well as toys and games that can also be fun and entertaining for the child. Tylor (1983) stated that the more literacy materials available, the more opportunities for the child to learn.

The parents were aware that not all of the materials were beneficial. While the television and internet could help the children’s listening skills and expand their vocabulary, it could also expose the children to inappropriate subjects like violence. In providing rooms for exercising and activities like swimming, parents also are aware that the child needs to develop physically as well as mentally. The quality of the resources and the materials available at home could contribute to the children’s eventual school success if parents help young children learn from these resources and materials and give enough time for the child to benefit from them.

These findings illustrate how parents can be instrumental in preparing their young children for school by engaging in with their children in different activities and learning experiences. The parents can teach them about Arabic and English language, family values, culture, religion, and literacy skills. Parents used play and role modeling, discussion, and story-telling to help their children learn.

The parents used different ways that they believed worked the best for teaching their children. Parents used different ways because each situation or event required them
to use a different way that was appropriate for that situation. For example, to teach culture the parents would tell stories about how people dress for different celebrations in the home culture. To teach Arabic, the parents would read a book or use flash cards. To teach a family value, the parents would have a discussion or set a good example. To teach religion they would pray with them. There are a variety of ways to teach children and the parents used all ways depending on the situation and their child’s needs.

Some parents stated that teaching reading and writing to their children was a hard task and they only occasionally sat with their children to teach literacy skills. All of the parents are well educated, so they do not lack literacy skills themselves. One possible explanation is that the parents do not have enough time. Another explanation is that they believe it is the school’s responsibility to teach their children. For example, the parents of Jaara’s and Habib’s families both stated “we leave that for school, the reading and writing.”

Additionally, unlike similar studies of other sub-populations, this study does not show that parents lack the ability to teach their young children certain skills for school or to engage with them in different activities like reading a book. Qian and Pan (2006) found that the literacy development of a child from a Chinese immigrant family was hindered because the parents did not know the English language, nor could they read or write in their native language. The parents did not read to the child or engage in other literacy activities. This was not the case in the families I interviewed, nor is it likely the case generally because Arab American families are usually educated and literate in at least one language (Semaan, 2007).
Because children spend the majority of their time with their mothers and
grandmothers, and these are the people who cook in the home, the children learn about
Arabic food. They can identify the names of Arabic foods and meals. They also learn
religious rules regarding food. For example, a religious law prohibits consuming a
specific kind of meat outside the home. In this way, the children learn about their family
religion by learning about the food.

In Arab culture, a greeting is very important. Arab American parents teach their
children how to make a proper greeting that shows respect. The children are taught the
difference between saying “Hi” to Americans and “Alslam Alikom” to other Arabic
Americans.

Arab Americans give their children Arabic names. These names are related to
religion and ancestors. The parents also said that these names are easier for other Arab
Americans to recognize and pronounce. This is an example of how parents’ beliefs are
powerful at shaping children’s identity. The children’s names are distinctly Arabic and
will serve as a constant reminder to the child of the child’s origins and family culture.

Additionally, this study revealed that parents who have been in the United States
for twenty years and those parents who have been in the United States for two years to 9
years provide the same support for their younger children and actively engage in with
their learning experiences at home. This may be because those who have been in United
States for twenty years might have experience with one or more children and they are
familiar with the school system and what their children need before entering school. For
those parents from recent immigrants families, it seems that because they are educated
and highly value education, they know what their children need before school. They
provide them with the appropriate materials and objects and engage with them to teach them academic or social skills. Some of them came here to pursue higher education, and they might be familiar with the American society and the school system. Or, they may have a network of relatives and friends living in America that can advise them on what to expect and how to prepare their children.

The findings also revealed that parents used different strategies to teach their children Arabic. Some read books to their children, and showed them new vocabulary words in the books. Some helped their children solve problems and had discussions with their children. This exercise encouraged the child to think critically about an issue and give in-depth answers. It seems that parents engaging in these types of activities with their children are educated and learned these methods when they were in school, or have older children and learned how to use these methods with them.

Some of the parents valued independence in their children and encouraged their children to learn for themselves. When taking the children out, they would ask the child to read a sign or identify the traffic light colors. The parents took any opportunity to teach their children, not just when they were at home. This is ideal because the more situations that the child is exposed to, the more the child can learn and develop his intelligence in multiple areas (Gardner, 1983).

Other studies have shown that ethnic sub-populations may have different expectations for school that depend on their home culture (Thao, 2003). Parents view school not only as a place for learning basic subjects, but also as a place where the safety rules taught at home are reinforced and expounded upon. It could be that parents believe
young children might listen more to teachers about safety issues and take the lesson more seriously because it is being taught by the teacher.

Parents expect their younger children to show respect to their teachers and obey the school rules in the same manner that they respect their parents and follow the home rules. They expect the school to teach how to show respect to adults and how to treat each other. They seem to view the school as a place for learning about manners, rules, safety, and how to be a good student.

The Board on Children and Families (1995) asserts that not all immigrant children have the same abilities, needs, learning experiences, or English proficiency. Moreover, not all children within each immigrant group develop at the same rate. There are too many factors outside of ethnicity that may influence a child’s development, including their parents’ educational level or parents’ English proficiency, their socioeconomic status, or the home culture.

Each family had its own strategy for preparing children for entering school. For some, accompanying the child on the first day to introduce the child to the teacher and some classmates was important to help the child adapt to the school environment. Other parents had discussions with their children about how to behave and be a good student. No method is better than another, as it depends on the child. Parents might choose the way they believe can work because they know their child best.

A notable finding from the case study is that the father in the Jaara’s family believes a child’s formal education should start at age seven. He did not specify what kind of learning the child can obtain before the age of seven. Despite my attempts to discover what the father thought the child could learn before age seven by asking the
same question in different ways, the father merely repeated that the child’s character is incomplete until age 7, after which he can learn anything. From my own experience being from the same culture, I surmise that his fixation on the age 7 originates from his religious beliefs, where practices such as praying and fasting are not required until the child is 7 years old. It is believed that at this age the child is mature enough to understand what is being taught.

The parent also added that before age seven, the child should have the freedom to learn whatever interests the child. This could be a good strategy, as it lets the child explore and make discoveries independently. It can make them confident in their own independence. It could be a bad strategy because without guidance, the child does not know what is important to learn about. The child will miss critical information because the child does not know that he or she needs it in the future. If children are given the freedom to spend most of their time doing what they love, they may not learn the basics of reading and writing and will struggle when they enter school.

Even the parent who believes this way stated that he provides materials and objects for his children to develop their learning skills; yet the parent’s role seems to be merely to give advice, direction, or explanation of what is right and wrong, and to not actively engage in teaching the child anything specific. It appears that the parent provide a rich learning environment without any expectation that the children learn or develop at a particular rate.

Conversely, the parents of Kayalli’s family take a proactive approach to give their children opportunities to learn both in and outside the home. They attended workshops with their children to learn how to build toy houses and tables using hammers and nails.
This allows the child to learn new skills and interact with people other than relatives. The new environment increases the child’s awareness of what else exists and what else may be of interest to explore.

Within the home, there were no differences among the Arab American families regarding the physical environment. The furniture and decorations were a mix of American and Arabic styles. This may be a mix of what they could purchase affordably in the United States mixed with what they may have brought from their home country, or what was given to them as a gift from others within their ethnic community.

Moreover there were similarities among these families in the resources available. All of the families had televisions and watched Arabic and English channels. Some homes had swimming pools or exercise rooms. Books, DVDs, and CDs were in English and Arabic. All of the homes had pictures on the walls of religious places or religious texts, like the name of God or Prophet Muhammad, or verses from the Quran.

Surveying the children’s work revealed that most of the children made simple drawings or wrote simple words. The written text demonstrated the level of literacy development in both Arabic and English. There were only simple words and numbers. Children may not have much work related to literacy because the parents may not reinforce the children to practice making letters and numbers. Or, there are so many other materials, games, and toys from which the child has the freedom to choose that drawing and writing are not as interesting to the child. If the child is not interested in reading and writing and the parents do not reinforce the practice, then the types of writing that the child does produce will likely be the most basic.
When asked what they believed was most important for their young children to learn, the Arab American parents stated that speaking Arabic was most important. They chose this learning over reading and writing. The parents based their beliefs on what is important on their memories of how they were raised. Their value of the Arabic language and culture is based on the importance that history and traditions had when they were children. In this way, even as the places changed for Arabic American families, the home culture remained the same. The home culture remained centered on the Arab language and customs.

**Limitations**

The primary goal of this study was to describe the Arab American children learning experiences in their naturalistic setting, which is the home. Despite the various methodologies used, this study had limitations.

Several limitations were inherent in the study’s design. First, because case study required intensive field contact, the study was limited to six Arab American families in the Northwest Ohio region of the United States. Second, the questions posed for research were best suited for a case study methodology. To gather meaningful and authentic information to answer the questions required an in-depth understanding of the home environment and multiple encounters with the family. Other methodologies likely would not have resulted in as rich a level of detail or as broad a scope of information to be obtained. Third, because I had to obtain signed consent forms from the families from the two schools in the Toledo area, the participants were limited to those who agreed to participate in this study. Fourth, because the purpose of this study was to describe the types of learning experiences Arab American children practice at home before entering
school, the study was limited to those families who have children in kindergarten or have children at kindergarten age, which is usually from 4-6 years old. Fifth, the study was limited to Arab American families with at least one parent that is a native speaker of Arabic. This was to keep in line with other researchers’ parameters, which defined Arabic American as “any American resident who comes from the Arabic-speaking world” (Monaghan, 2003), or families who have at least one parent whose native language is Arabic (Abudalbeh, 1996; Suleiman, 1999).

Finally, the study was limited to the amount of time in which it could be conducted. The time constraints afforded only a few interviews and interactions with the parents, which only provided a snapshot of the family home environment at a given time, and not how it may have changed over the course of many years raising children in the United States.

**Conclusion**

Overall, I observed that the nature of the Arab American home environment of the case study families was generally similar to the homes of families I have known in Arab countries. The language they speak, the clothing they wear, the religious practices they follow, the names they give their children, the way they greet people – all of these aspects of the Arab American families I have witnessed in Arab homes as well. The only difference I observed is that in addition to Arabic, the families in the case study also speak English.

Arab American children are encouraged to speak both Arabic and English in the home, as parents consider both languages important for their children to know. Parents value speaking Arabic as a way to honor the family’s ethnic heritage and native culture.
and as a way to confirm family solidarity. They put less emphasis to English at home because they view it as important only for academic pursuits.

Moreover, parents do not place a great emphasis on literacy development in the home prior to the child entering school. At most the children learn basics like how to read or write their names, addresses, and say their alphabet.

Parents like their young children to know about their culture and other cultures. Specifically, parents want them to know about family roots, history, values, customs, and language so that young children can understand why parents behave, act or talk in a certain way. They also want their children to know about American customs and to take advantage of the educational opportunities in the United States.

The study revealed that parents set many rules for their children. They are more likely to use positive reinforcement such as giving the child a new toy or taking him out as a way to reward the child for good behavior. Parents consider obeying rules as a sign of respect and loyalty.

The parents categorized their children as both dependent and independent, depending on the child’s mood and development, as well as the situation. They encouraged their child to be dependent in circumstances where the child might engage in a dangerous activity. On the other hand, they also encouraged the young children to be curious and explore new things by themselves.

The study also found that children have many materials and objects available at home, and most of these materials are educational. Additionally, parents described themselves as the most important resource for their young children to teach them about different things and to develop their social and academic skills. Parents were balanced in
providing things for academic purposes and for fun, as well as for building their bodies and developing their thinking.

Zaman (2006) measured the richness of a child’s literacy environment based on the amount of writing tools, books, CDs, and videos available to the child. Based on his measurements, the Arab American homes were rich literacy environments because there were many books, CDs, and DVDs for the children to read, watch, or listen to.

Aside from parents and materials, siblings were also a common resource from which children could learn. Children spent the majority of time with their siblings and often imitated them to learn how to do new things.

Another important finding from this study was that parents stated they focus more on their children’s social and emotional development than academic preparedness to enter school. They believe that this was the best way to ensure their children would adapt to the new environment of school.

The study also found that lack of time is an issue preventing fathers from teaching and preparing their younger children for school. The fathers expressed guilt at not having enough time to spend with their children. Even when the fathers have time, they use it to work with older siblings and do not pay as much attention to the younger children.

The time that parents do spend with their children is time engaged in activities such as watching television, storytelling, lecturing, and playing games. The parents spend very little, if any, time teaching the child basic academic skills. Accordingly, the parent’s first expectation for their children was not to perform well in school on academic skills, but instead to act in a socially acceptable manner. The parents stated that they expected their children to behave in school, follow the rules, and show respect to the teacher and
their classmates. They expected teachers to teach academic skills, safety awareness, and manners. Additionally, the parents would like the teachers to be aware that their children may not speak English as well as their classmates and that they act shy because they do not know the language as well. They also want teachers to know about their children’s health issues in case of an emergency.

Because the focus is on social adaptation, the Arab American parents prepare their children to enter school by talking with them and accompanying them to school on the first day to make introductions with the teacher and some of the other students. They seem to be more concerned with how the child will fit in and not as concerned about how hard or easy it will be for the child to learn academic concepts. This may be because they believe teaching children is difficult. They believe that the teachers are the professionals and will know how to best teach their children.

The study did not show differences between those families that have lived in the United States for 20 years and those who were recent immigrants. All provided the same amount of learning materials and all stressed social and emotional development over academic development.

In sum, ignoring the home culture can be detrimental to a child’s learning. If teachers understand the home culture of their students, they will know the learning experiences the children have had at home before entering school. The teachers can anticipate any special needs the children may have and adjust their teaching methods for these children accordingly. They will understand why a child behaves a certain way and not assume the child is shy or unintelligent. Moreover, the findings can add to the
discussion about how immigrant children prepare to enter American schools, and what the role of teachers should be in that transition.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

There is considerable room for additional research asking the same kinds of questions that would examine other Arab American families and their children’s learning experiences. The studies could be conducted in different regions of Ohio or in other communities with a large population of Arab American families. Research could be conducted to explore the specific methods parents use to teach their children and assess which of these methods are most effective.

Finally, this study prompts possibilities for further investigations. Future studies could focus on one small aspect of this study. I could use tests to determine what children already know before they enter school. I could compare how immigrant children fare between different ethnicities or as compared to Americans. This could open the door for further research both into the preparedness of Arab Americans in different parts of the country as well as the preparedness of other ethnic minorities.

Additionally, I could conduct a comparison study (e.g., Arab/Arab American children compared to children from other cultures and backgrounds) to examine the TV viewing habits and the time children and their parents spend watching TV shows at home, the types of program parents and children watch, and who chooses the programs. This study could be important to determine how beneficial the time is that children spend at home, what these programs help the children to learn, and whether or not the programs are effective as educational tools.
Recommendations

For parents

Children in the study like to learn about what they find fun or interesting. Some children ask their siblings how to write their names and other words in both English and Arabic. However, the parents did not consistently engage in literacy activities, and instead allowed the children to play on their own. The parents should be aware that young children cannot know what is important to learn and should be a more active in guiding the children to engage in learning activities that can help them later in school.

The parents stated that their children are curious to learn. This raises the question of how parents can direct their children’s curiosity to learn things that can help them at school and also be fun, so that the child continues to want to learn about it. The parents could direct their children by giving encouraging words, small rewards or taking them on field trips. The parents could be role models, being just as curious as the child to learn a new subject. Every child is different, so the way that parents direct their children toward learning activities will depend on the needs of the child.

The frequency with which parents read to their children and the types of books they read to them is also important. The parents should involve their child in reading, letting them look at the words and stopping to explain new vocabulary words. They should also discuss the story with the child after it is finished to evaluate how much the child comprehended. The parents did not state that they test their children’s knowledge of a story, or allow the child to read, or explain how to listen to a story. These are the critical skills necessary for literacy development.
For teachers

Teachers should take the time to learn some of the language and background of their Arab American students. The parents in the study believe that teachers should not assume that all Arab American children can speak English. They thought it was important for the teachers to know some Arabic so that if there was an emergency, the teacher could understand the child. It seems that the parents expect the teachers to have additional responsibilities when the teachers have immigrant children in the classroom. A teacher that can speak a little Arabic may be able to develop a relationship with the child more easily. The child may respect that teacher more and be a better student in that teacher’s classroom.

Teachers should also recognize that Arab American children may need extra attention in developing academic skills. The study revealed that parents focus more on emotional and social preparations for their children and the child may not have the same level of knowledge as their peers upon entering school. Teachers may want to perform a pre-test of the children to discover what skills they have and what the teachers need to teach the children moving forward.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Parents

1. What language/ languages do your children speak at home?
2. What language is most spoken by children at home?
3. At home which language(s) does your child use to read and write?
4. At home in what language/ languages do your children listen to music/ songs, radio etc.
5. At home in which language/languages do your children watch TV programs/videos/films etc.
6. What language do you think is important for your child to learn and why?
7. Do your children know how to read and write before entering school? If yes, in which language/ languages?
8. If your child can read and write before entering school, who taught the child to read and write?
9. What can your child read and for what purposes?
10. Does your child know how to write? If yes, what types of writing does your child practice at home and for what purposes?
11. Do you think that the reading and writing your child does at home before entering school can help prepare him to read and write in school? Why or why not?
12. What are the things you believe are important for your children to learn about their own culture? Specify please.
13. What are the things you believe are important for your children to learn from other cultures? And why?
14. At home what are the family rules?

15. What are the family values you would like your children to learn? Specify please
[e.g., respect elders, customs, beliefs, etc.]

16. What are the things that your child can do/learn by himself without assistance?
Specify please (e.g., organize his stuff, fix things by himself e.g., his toys, his books, his games).

17. What are the things that your child cannot do/learn independently and needs assistance to do? Specify please.

18. At home, how would you describe your child—dependent (asking for help) or independent (does things without asking for help?) And why.

19. At home, do you see your children as curious to learn about things by themselves? Specify please.

20. What resources—e.g., television, computer, internet, or books—are available for your children at home to learn from?

21. How do your children use these resources to learn?

22. What are the things your children learn when they interact with each other? Specify please

23. Do older children teach or help younger children at home? What are the things they do to help each other?

24. Who teaches the child what, the mother or the father, and why?

25. What do you think your role will be to prepare your child to school?

26. What are the factors (e.g., time constraints, not familiar with what should be taught, your belief that it is the role of school to teach these skills, or you don’t know how
to teach these skills) that might hinder you from teaching your child the lessons (language skills, math concepts) you believe are important for them to learn before entering school?

27. How does your child spend the whole day at home?

28. How do you spend your time with your children at home?

29. With whom does the child interact [communicate] more at home? For example, the mother, father, sibling, grandmothers, grandfathers.

30. What are the things you believe are important for your child to learn at home before entering school? And why?

31. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your children’s learning experiences at home?
Appendix B

Survey for Parents

(For each parent)

1. What country/countries are you from?

2. How long have you lived in the United States?

3. What were the circumstances that led you to move to the United States? Could you please tell me briefly about your moving history to the U. S.? Did you come to the U. S. directly from your home country? What other countries did you live in between moving from your home country and moving to the U. S.? Did you come directly to this city? What other cities in the U. S. have you lived in with your family? Once in the US, how often have you moved and where have you lived?

4. What is your age?

   Father
   A) 18 – 25
   B) 25 – 30
   C) 30 – 35
   D) 35 – 40
   E) 40 – 45+

   Mother
   A) 18 – 25
   B) 25 – 30
   C) 30 – 35
   D) 35 – 40
5. What is your annual total income level?
   A) $0 – $20,000
   B) $20,000 – $70,000
   C) $70,000 – $150,000
   D) $150,000 – $250,000
   E) Over $250,000

6. What is your education? (How many years of formal education have you had?)

7. What is/are your religious affiliation(s)?

8. How many children do you have?

9. How many sons? How old are they? How many were born in the U. S.? How many were born outside the U. S.?

10. How many daughters? How old are they? How many were born in the U. S.? How many were born outside the U. S.?

11. At home do you provide your child with
    2. Drawing tools (e.g., 1. drawing papers 2. Crayon 3. pencils 4. Others
    3. Reading materials (e.g., 1. audio books 2. books/stories 3. Others and in what language/languages?
    4. DVD’s/CD’S to learn how to read and speak? If yes in what language/languages?

    5. Are there any other materials you provide your children with to help them learn and to be prepared for school? Please explain.
12. In what ways do you engage in with your children to help them learn about:

1. Language
2. Family or cultural values
3. Religion
4. Reading, writing etc.