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**FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE OF ARAB IMMIGRANT FAMILIES: AN  
EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS,  
PARENTS, AND TEACHERS**

by

**HIBA KAHIL ELHAJJ**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

Of Wayne State University,

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2016

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Approved By:

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Advisor Date

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my incredible mother Houda who inspired me with her determination and willpower and to my husband Nouhad, the one and only in my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of my committee chair Dr. Poonam Arya for working diligently with me and making me realize that this work was possible. I now believe more in myself because of you.

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Finally, to my special friend, Michelle Ullrich and her family. We try to make sense of a chaotic world together. I greatly appreciate your being there for me in every sense. You are a divine person who proves that “a friend in need, is a friend indeed”.

## **PREFACE**

The purpose of this study was to examine the different perspectives of students, parents, and teachers about the home literacy practices and backgrounds of Arab immigrant families. The main focus of this study was to look into the out-of-school activities and daily routines that Arab immigrant students engaged in to shed light on the skills and capital that were embedded in their daily literacy practices and whether those skills were identified by their teachers.

This research is important for two reasons. First, it draws attention to the assets that Arab immigrant students have and thus works on eliminating the deficit view towards immigrant students. The study helps teachers recognize the capital and the wealth of knowledge that immigrant students bring to class. Second, research is limited when it comes to Arab immigrants. There is abundance in research about other minorities in the United States such as Asian, Latino, and Native Americans; but Arab immigrant students are still underrepresented in research. By looking at these two important reasons, more research can be conducted to help Arab immigrant students reach their full potentials.

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“Tell me who you mingle with and I can tell you who you are.” An Arabic adage.

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

The number of students who speak a language other than English has been rising tremendously in schools in the United States. According to the United States Census Bureau, around 16 million immigrants entered the United States during the 1990s; a record-setting pace that exceeded one million per year. This rapid increase resulted in the rise in the number of children in schools whose native language was other than English. As of 2004, the United States Census Bureau reported one English learner for every five students. The number of individuals who speak a non-English language at home increased by 148 percent between 1980 and 2009; individuals who speak Arabic have increased in number from 165 to 251 thousand within the same decade.

The United States Census Bureau (2010) indicates that the number of Arab household in the United States has increased by a ninety-one percent since 1990. Unlike the beginning of the century, in which Arabic people came seeking economic stability, today’s Arabic immigrants are fleeing from war-torn countries, bloodshed, and unstable political situations. The highest number of Arab immigrants are Lebanese followed by Egyptian, Syrian, Palestinian, Moroccan, Iraqi, Jordanian, and then Yemeni (U.S. Census, 2010). The number of Arabic immigrants has been on the rise especially in the past few years, as well, in large part due to the unstable political situation in the Arabic countries.

When students arrive in the United States, they are faced with much more than just learning a new language, they have a lot of catching up to do in order to compete with their peers who were born in the United States in terms of adapting to a new academic system, getting accustomed to the different daily class routines, and grasping the right linguistic register along

with the cultural knowledge necessary for success. The idea of cultural competence is important, particularly, as demonstrated in the field of literacy research, that, cultural literacy practices of the home have an influence on students' achievement at school (Compton-Lilly, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Heath, 2012; and Li, 2012). In schools where there are no multicultural programs implemented and in which the school relies on students to adopt the school culture instead of building on students' experiences and knowledge, students might be at a disadvantage because their culture is not recognized by the institution (Janks, 2010). This happens primarily in schools where "culturally and linguistically diverse students" assets and strengths go unnoticed (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Janks, 2010; Li, 2000, 2007; Nieto, 2010), perhaps because schools and teachers simply do not recognize the cultural capital that these students bring. This study investigates, in one school, the cultural capital that Arabic immigrant students bring to school with them and the extent to which those resources are or are not noticed within the primarily mainstream culture of the school. Specifically, this study looks into whether and how the literacy practices of Arab immigrant students are recognized and built upon by investigating the different perceptions that immigrant students, their parents, and teachers have about home literacy practices. Comparing these responses allows us to determine the role of these practices in developing students' cultural, social, and positional identities in the classroom. The study primarily investigates literacy since literacy is about using language to create meaning, which is essential to success in all areas of the curriculum, so, without first addressing literacy needs, we do not have a mechanism to address curricular needs.

### **Background of the Problem**

The high influx of immigrants into the United States is rapidly changing the demographics of schools. Statistics available from the National Clearing House for English

Language Acquisition (NCELA, 2012) show that in 2009 total student enrollment in K-12 classes increased by 7%, while the English learners' enrollment increased by 51%. In 2011-12, the number of English learners in the United States was estimated to be 4.4 million students; whereas the number of English learners in 1999-2000, just 12 years earlier, was only 3 million. That is an increase of 1.4 million in one decade. The highest concentration of students of immigrant families is in the state of California where 68 percent of students are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). However, the number of LEP students is fast growing in other states also especially in the Southeast, Midwest, and interior West (US Census, 2010).

Arabic immigrant students are the new rising ethnic group among the school-aged population in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011-12, English language learner (ELL) students in U.S. cities made up an average 14.2 percent of total public school enrollment. While Spanish predominates other languages spoken by immigrants due to the fact that large number of immigrants were born in Spanish-speaking countries like Mexico and the Dominican Republic, Arabic is also among the top ten languages spoken by children of immigrants (Capps et al., 2005).

Since the 1960s, the United States has witnessed a decrease in the number of European immigrants and an increase in the number of immigrants from Latin America and Asia (Martin & Widgren, 2002). However, in south east Michigan, the number of Asian immigrants is 201,000 which exceeds the number of European immigrants and Latin Americans combined (156,000). Immigrants to south east Michigan that originate from Western Asia specifically, where most Arabic countries are located, comprise 77,349 immigrants which makes them the minority group with the highest population of immigrants in comparison to groups from other regions in Asia (NCELA, 2012).

According to Schwartz (1999), the United States school system includes Arab students from more than 20 different Arabic countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa such as: Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Morocco. Arabic immigrants differ from other immigrants in the United States in many ways, primarily due to the ways in which they differ from each other: First, they come from 22 different countries, both Asian and African, with an array in traditions, cultures, and practices. Second, they speak a wide range of dialects which are not typically mutually understood as oral language, but are unified by the standard written Arabic. Third, their countries vary widely in climate and topography. Fourth, their religions differ; they are primarily Christians and Muslims, each of which in turn branch into many sects. Fifth, a wide variety of political turmoil and economic conditions are reasons for the flow of the Arabic immigrant into the United States (Constantino & Lavadenz, 1993). The magnitude of these differences within the Arabic population means that attempting to understand Arabic immigrants as one cultural group may lead to misinterpretations and awry accounts of them as one ethnic group.

The number of Arab-American people in the United States ranges between what is estimated at 1,967,219 according to the 2010 United States Census and what some Arab-American organizations affirm as an accurate number of 3,664,789 based on surveys conducted in the Arabic communities by the American Community Survey (Arab-American Institute, 2012). Two thirds are concentrated in 10 states; one third of the total live in California, New York, and Michigan. Michigan ranks as the state populated by the second highest number of Arab immigrants after California. However, what differentiates Michigan from California is the fact that the majority of Arab immigrants are concentrated in one relatively small geographic area (Arab American Institute, 2012).

According to the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) count in 2012-13, there were 76,955 ELs in Michigan K-12 schools who were funded by Title III, the English Language Acquisition Program. Of all native and/or home languages spoken by ELs, approximately 70 percent of them were Spanish (32,000 ELs or 46 percent) or Arabic (18,000, or 25 percent) (MDE, 2013).

The number of ELs or Arabic origin in south east Michigan is continuously increasing. For example, in a district located in South East Michigan that has an enrollment of 19,315 students, 11,753 students are identified as English learners who receive language support services of which 11,240 (95.6%) are of Arabic descent. According to the district's statistics, the number of ELs has risen from 5,916 in the 2009-10 school year to 6,580 in 2014-15 (a 75 proportion of ELs in 5 years). Also, in one high school in that district, the ELL population has grown 6% from 2006 to 44% in 2012. With the continuous increase of Arabic immigrants as a growing subgroup, this district and many others have found themselves reexamining their instructional goals to meet the new demands in their schools. For example, one south east Michigan high school's school improvement plan included goals such as to implement culturally responsive teaching, increase out of classroom experiences to support the gap in knowledge that many students coming to the high school have, and increase parental involvement.

Children of immigrant families not only bring rich resources and contribute to the diversity of the student body in schools, but they also present a challenge to educators who are not familiar with their backgrounds and experiences, particularly when there can be as many combinations of backgrounds and experiences as there are immigrant students. The daily literacy routines of the immigrant students are shaped by characteristics of their identities,

milieu, native languages, the English language, social practices, competencies, and perspectives of the world. With different backgrounds come different literacy practices that embed cultural traits and identities. Unfortunately, schools sometimes can be unaware of children's unique practices and their potential effects on literacy development in school. Al-Khatib (1999) indicates that Arabic students have been less visible as a minority in the United States and their culture and heritage is not explored in public education. Therefore, this study helps to gain insight on the culturally-specific home literacy practices of Arabic immigrant families from the standpoints of the concerned people: Arabic immigrant students, their parents, and teachers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The socio-cultural point of view considers the learner a social and cultural being that is understood in the context of interactions with other individuals, contexts, and materials around him (Goodman, 1996; Smith, 1997). Gee (2001) explains that learning is deeply influenced by the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the learner is situated. In this sense, students develop their literacy from multiple sources such as: school, home, friends, the community, media, society, and so on; and students' literate practices become interwoven with these social domains and cultural practices. When immigrant students come to school, they bring with them knowledge that has developed from their lives' unique experiences and social lives. Unfortunately, in today's global society, the educational system in the United States is still subtractive in practice and views students who speak a secondary language with a narrow lens, often giving them labels that reflect a deficit view.

Although immigrant students might not be proficient in English when they come to the United States, the households of many immigrant students are characterized by rich cultural practices, community capital, and distinctive life experiences. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti

(2005) describe these assets as funds of knowledge or “knowledge and skills among families that have developed throughout history and by being immersed in a specific culture” (p.72).

Similarly, Li (2001, 2006) described the “cultural capital” of Chinese families in Canada and the United States and the ways in which they went about attaining literacy through practices that were not identified by the school’s formal education system. In this case, the “funds of knowledge” or “cultural capital” went unrecognized. This is a prime example of the rich knowledge of immigrant households that does not conform to formal education at schools going unnoticed and causing students to suffer.

Other research in the field has documented how children’s early literacy is contingent upon their home environments and family practices. The greater the similarity between children’s home and school-based literacy practices, the greater the chances of school success. However, the more students’ literacies reflected their unique and distinctive home cultural practices, the more difficulties they would encounter at school as documented by Heath (1983, 2012).

Resources available to children at home and through their community are important factors in their achievement. Coleman (1988) emphasized the importance of family capital by distinguishing among financial, human, and social capital which respectively correspond to wealth or income, parents’ educational attainment, and the time and effort which families and communities invest in their children. Many examples of social capital are present in immigrant households such as parents’ expectations of a child going to college or the relations among persons in the community which provide networks of social connections that form strong families and communities. Such resources are valuable assets in households that could represent

means for educators to build upon but which are sometimes unexploited by the educational system.

Although there are several seminal pieces of research on the literate practices of cultural minority groups, very little has been written about the Arabic culture in these regards (Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb, 1997). Compton-Lilly (2001, 2003, and 2012) explored the identity and literacy construction of mainstream and ethnic students especially Puerto-Ricans. Fayden (2006) showed the cultural aptitude and abilities of Native-American students. Li (2001, 2006, 2008) investigated the development of literacy and identity among immigrant Chinese families and found that the Chinese family practices were complex and multifaceted. And finally, Moll et al. (e.g., 2005) extensively researched the funds of resources abundant in Mexican communities. Amidst all of this, research that sheds light on the families of Arabic students where their culture and identities intersect to define their literacy practices is still scarce, which is problematic given that the number of Arab households in the United States has increased by 91% since 1990 (US Census, 2010) which has simultaneously increased the number of English learners at schools.

In my review of literature, I used three search engines (ProQuest Research Library, PsychINFO, and ERIC) to conduct a search using the words “literacy” and “immigrant families”. The result yielded 1491 related researches that fall under this subject. However, only ten of those were related to Arabic populations. When I looked at those ten results, I found that only seven studies deal with the literacy of Arabic immigrants. Among those studies, only one looked at Arabic immigrant students in the high school; however, it focused only on Yemeni girls and how they understood their religious and secular texts. The misalignment of the growing Arab-American population and the limited results of this search highlights the need to

look at this population as a minority group and understand their perceptions about their specific literacy practices in order to determine which practices/factors contribute most to their success in schools.

### **Research Questions**

The study attempts to investigate the following questions:

1. What are four Arab immigrant high school students' perceptions about their backgrounds and home literacy practices?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about the students' backgrounds and home literacy practices?
3. What are Arab immigrant parents' perceptions about their home environments and home literacy practices?

In order to answer these research questions, I will be observing the home literacy practices of Arab immigrant students and interviewing them, their teachers and then their parents in order to understand about their home literacy environments and see commonalities and differences across the different perspectives.

### **Importance of the Study**

This study explores perceptions about the home literacy practices of immigrant Arab students from the points of view of varied stakeholders. Those home literacy practices are important since they result in the formations of students' cultural, social, and positional identities. One way in which the study contributes to theories of literacy development is by looking at how home and school literacies, as well as the relationship between them, are perceived by immigrant Arabic students and their families. The study provides awareness of the home environments by understanding the families' backgrounds and the specific cultural

practices of immigrant families. Second, the study looks at the same phenomenon (home literacy practices) from multiple perspectives (i.e., those of parents, students, and teachers). It brings all those perspectives together to inform us about how these three perspectives impact each other. In addition, the study provides rich descriptions of the specific home literacy practices of four Arabic students, and the degree to which common misunderstandings may exist about the role of home literacy in schooling across stakeholders. Moreover, since the student participants in the study come from families that vary in the levels of each capital they are able to provide (among other differences), we are also able to see variation in home literacy practices within this Arabic group. Third, this study opens the door for the development of culturally relevant and multicultural programs to value and build on Arabic students' experiences within the school setting and in society and thus facilitate for students and their families the process of adjustment to the new culture. While the results do not generalize to the larger population of all Arabic students, the study does serve to point out the value of attempting to understand students' literate lives beyond school because it highlights the influence of the home literacy practices, whatever they may be, on school literacy.

### **Definition of Terms**

Home literacy practices of immigrant families is a field with wide variety of in interpretation of terms. Therefore, it is essential to define key terms to guide the reader throughout the chapters.

1. Arabic immigrant families: This term is used to refer to the families who emigrated to the U.S. from different Arabic countries and who share a common written language though there are differences in spoken dialects. For the purpose of this study, a defining characteristic is that

they have emigrated within the last ten years seeking safety, economic stability, and better education for their children.

2. Literacy practices of immigrant families: This term refers to the specific literacy practices of immigrant families and community members around them which include rich personal experiences and which might fall under any of the following categories based on Taylor and Dorosy-Gaines's (1988) identification of literacy practices among families: instrumental literacy (daily tasks), social interactional literacy (to network with others), news-related literacy (knowledge of different events), recreational reading, writing as a substitute of oral messages, writing as an aid to memory, financial reading, and work-related writing. These home literacy practices represent social and cultural patterns of doing something. In addition, because technology is much more prevalent in school and home literacy practices as compared to when Taylor and Dorosy-Gaines developed their categories, my definition of literacy practices includes how technology is being utilized in the households to advance knowledge and experience.
3. Home backgrounds: This term means the environment of the home where students spend time in interaction with parents, siblings, other family members; where exchange of ideas as well as cultural events take place; and where children go about conducting their daily routine activities. The term also includes the social class, level of education of parents, and the composition of the family.
4. Perceptions: Perceptions are a state of awareness, realization, and comprehension of things through the senses. It also includes the mental impressions that people form as they go about their daily lives. Different people may form different perceptions about the same issue or event.

Perceptions will provide an insight of the different views and opinions that students, parents, and teachers have about students' home literacy practices.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the home literacy practices of Arabic high school English Language Learners (ELLs) in order to explore the unique literacy practices that are impacted by the culture and identities of immigrant families. Looking at how culture, identity, and literacy intersect in the homes of Arabic immigrant families informs the field about the wealth of experiences that immigrant children possess. In order to do that, it is important to inspect the perceptions of parents, teachers, and students regarding students' literacy practices, which helps uncover the identities that students project in school. Examining how parents, teachers, and students' perspectives might overlap or contrast with each other has the potential to inform the field about specific literacy practices of one particular group, Arabic immigrant families, and inform educators about how to best meet the needs of these immigrant students. However, a general awareness of the existence of this overlap and contrast also stands to influence how we think about our positioning of the home literacy practices of all students. Examining the different perceptions among teachers, students, and parents may also uncover the strengths among immigrant families that go unrecognized at school and help inform the field about the Arabic ELL population. In this chapter I first explain the relationship between culture, literacy and identity; then I explore the importance of investigating the family literacy practices and prior experiences of students. Finally, the chapter presents theoretical and research support that sheds light on the significance of teachers, parents, and students' perspectives and the importance of their input about students' literacy practices.

## **Culture, Identity, and Literacy**

In this section, I present three main ideas: First, I discuss the relationship between identity, culture, and literacy, highlighting how these three facets share a bidirectional relationship, with special focus on how identity and culture impact literacy. In the second section, I discuss the three kinds of identity: cultural, social, and positional. I draw upon literature in the field to demonstrate how the three different concepts of identity are important for understanding specific literacy practices that might impact students' attainment at school. The third section calls upon significant studies in the field which demonstrate that students' home literacy practices play an important role in their education and that students' background experiences are rich with resources that can be tapped into in the classrooms to help students progress.

**The relationship between culture, identity and literacy.** From a sociocultural lens, culture, identity, and literacy are intricately connected and affect the learner deeply, especially in immigrant families. Students' literacy practices are intertwined within the contexts of culture and identity. Culture and identity are dialectically related: culture shapes identity, identity shapes culture, and both have an impact on literacy. The intersection between culture and identity produces cultural identity, which is significant to learning, especially for immigrant students. Culture characterizes different groups of people through internal and/or external features thus creating two deeper subcultures that might not be noticeable to the outside observer. The role of culture is globally visible in the literacy practices of families; however, there is no solid or comprehensive definition of culture in the literature specific to literacy.

**Culture.** Culture is generally known as the beliefs, customs, and arts of particular people in society (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Culture gives groups of people unique qualities such

as language, customs, ways of being, and believing. Brislin (1990) refers to culture as “the maintained similar behaviors that differentiate among peoples of the world” (p.12). Hence, we can distinguish among the Eastern culture, African culture, American culture, and so on. Each culture has its own patterns of behavior and habits that differentiates it from other cultures around the world.

Seelye (1984) suggests that culture is comprised of all the attributes of a people such as clothing, language, food, and celebrations, thus defining culture concretely as consisting of the external features that differentiate people and make them distinguishable. Other researchers (Brislin, 1990; Schwartz, 2009) think of culture as an abstract term- a construct that represents a set of distinctive behaviors, values, and perspectives manifested in the actions of people and which create specific ways of behaving, communicating, valuing and interacting with others and with the surroundings. This study will integrate both, the internal (Seelye) and the external (Brislin; Schwartz) concepts and considerations of culture because looking at one aspect of culture or the other will only provide an incomplete perspective about the human life and its features. So culture will be considered in its broadest conceptualization, which embraces all features of human life, whether abstract and/or tangible, as well as internal and/or external as it encompasses all the aspects of life. Family literacy will be investigated as it manifests itself in culturally-specific practices.

***Microculture.*** Sometimes sub-groups of the same broad culture can have slight variations in their habits and practices that can set them apart from each other; but the variations remain minor enough to maintain the groups under the same cultural label. Variations in dialect, social class, attire, and forms of celebrations can be used to distinguish one group from the other within the same culture. These minute differences create a “microculture” (Banks, 1990, p.56).

A microculture is a subdivision of a large culture that manifests itself in diminutive differences in the habits of living. These differences are negligible in that they maintain the regional people under the same broad concept of culture; yet, if viewed by a narrow lens, one can easily identify their different aspects. An example of a microculture could be the slight differences between the people of the northern and southern regions of a country, the people of the city and country people, and the residents of the coastal regions and inland residents.

***Subculture.*** A microculture can also be subdivided into another smaller category, subculture. In each culture there are certain invisible aspects that are only known to an insider. These aspects are not noticeable to an individual from outside the culture itself. They are only known to an insider and an individual must be part of the culture in order to understand them. For example, bargaining could be an acceptable practice in one culture but an insult to the seller in another culture. Similarly using the phrase “shut up” with a Mexican student could be extremely insulting and equivalent to swearing for an American student.

As they discuss ethnographic methods, McCurdy, Spradley, and Shandy (2005) differentiate between a microculture and subculture. McCurdy and colleagues explain that a microculture exists within the larger group and is acquired when people interact with these groups such as the microculture of recreational groups, church groups, and so on. On the other hand, a subculture or “subgroup”, as the authors call it, is found within a microculture and it requires special inside knowledge that is not detectable by observation, as in the following scenario.

By narrating the experience of a white western woman while visiting her husband’s Korean family, Janks (2010) clearly depicted what a subculture means. Janks explained that when the subject of her study tried to take part of simple house chores as expected from a

daughter-in-law and in order to fit in, she was criticized and deemed inadequate because she did not follow the protocol of how a household would do the dishes in a particular way. Janks explained that though the woman was fluent in the Korean language, it did not serve her because she had not acquired a sense of the beliefs and values of that culture and a perception of its imperceptible aspects in order to fit in with that family. The western woman in this case was dealing with the invisible aspects of the culture, or the subculture.

As explained above, a “microculture” remains visible to a certain extent, yet a “subculture” is invisible. Brislin (1990) states that people can be connected by strong emotional ties to form this invisible culture. A school’s invisible culture is the hidden curriculum of the school which Banks (2010) states, “No teacher ever teaches, but that all students learn” (p. 19). The hidden curriculum refers to the hidden rules, how schools deal with diversity, or whom students associate with at school and why (Banks, 2010). In this study it will be important to be aware of culture and its subdivisions and of diminutive behaviors that might not be recognizable by an individual who is not familiar with the students’ culture. The different behaviors/cultural characteristics that students display at school might play a significant role in their education as immigrant students. Therefore, these topics of culture, microculture, and subculture are important in this study because they may encompass specific elements that explain students’ unique literacy practices and specific activities pertaining to their cultures. This study explores different perceptions related to cultural practices which shed light on specific characteristics of students’ subcultural divisions and not only culture at the surface level in its physical and behavioral attributes. Shedding light on the concealed aspects of culture may allow us to identify veiled behaviors that are culturally specific.

**The social-cultural nature of literacy.** Literacy develops from a particular social and cultural context (Gee, 2012; Goodman, 1996; and Heath 1983, Janks, 2009). By examining the effects of the preschool home and community environments on children Heath (1983) determined that literacy was connected with the habits and values of behaving that members of societies have in common. In fact, Heath's ethnography demonstrated the connection between literacy and culture by showing that the "different ways children learned to use language were dependent on the ways in which each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization" (p.11). For example, in a community that used play to develop language along with storytelling which stressed details and correctness, children developed different literacy skills than in a community that emphasized verbal play like songs and where children were talked to and not read to. Heath's ethnography reflects the relationship that literacy and culture share by showing how literacy is affected by the social interactions around language in the cultural communities in which children grow up.

Goodman (1996) also discussed the social-cultural nature of literacy. As he explained, the cultural aspects of language are created by every individual community, and people learn those aspects by participating in them and using them, for example, how to carry on a telephone conversation. Goodman further explained that readers' comprehension of a text is contingent on the knowledge, experience, interest, and values that readers bring to the reading. In other words, there is a "transaction" (p.92) that takes place as readers reach comprehension by negotiating the meaning from the text and their personal experiences. That illustrates the relationship between literacy and identity which refers to the part of the self that is invested in literacy.

Similarly, Janks (2010) affirmed that “we bring who we come from to the process of production and reception of spoken, written, and visual texts” (p. 58). Like Goodman, Janks affirmed the idea of taking and giving from a text as well as the importance of cultural literacy. She also explained that readers should read ‘with’ and ‘against’ a text. In other words, readers should engage their subjectivity in reading the text using their own experiences and cultural location but at the same time not to succumb completely to the text (i.e., readers should read critically).

The relationship between literacy, culture, and identity was also revealed in Bell’s (1997) self-study as she learned Chinese as an adult. Bell concluded that culture impacts the practices of literacy and that literacy is influenced by identity. Bell’s work indicates that literacy extends beyond the cognitive factors and is attached to culture and context; it also requires cultural knowledge. She discovered that identity was tied up with the language that a person learned to speak so that as individuals became literate in a new language it was like “looking in the mirror with a new face” (p.199). That new knowledge/literacy incorporated entering and exiting from two different worlds. The study also showed how culture also impacted literacy. For example, Bell learned that in the Chinese culture, proper conditions must exist in order for children to learn at home such as a clean desk and a quiet room so that children can focus. In contrast, in the American culture, children can sit in front of the TV and do their homework. Also, Chinese students developed a connection with their names, while in American society name meanings are not as significant. Another example of how literacy and culture were connected in Bell’s study was reflected in her frustration as she tried to rely on her personal experiences with print along with her experiences as an ESL teacher to learn Chinese. She discovered that becoming literate in Chinese meant looking differently at education and

entering a new world where her past successful performance as a student along with expertise in predicting the teacher's behavior in the new culture were dysfunctional. In short, Bell realized that learning a new language extended beyond learning how to decode characters to include the social and cultural contexts of how the new language is used. Therefore, she had to develop a new cultural identity, different from the one she used to learn English, in order to become literate in Chinese.

The above discussion demonstrates how culture impacts literacy, and how literacy affects a person's identity and is affected by it. From another standpoint, culture also shares an intricate relationship with one's concept of the self – (i.e., identity). Chung (2011) explains that individuals' behaviors and identities are shaped by culture through the influence of individuals' families, environments, and media. This takes place over time and is achieved through communications that “reframe and modify our self-views, in a continuous cycle of negotiation” (p.407). In this sense, one's identity is continuously modified, constantly changing and evolving via the influence of the immediate environment (culture) in a never ending cycle which opens the door for the creation of many identities, contingent with the surroundings.

**Different identities of immigrant students.** Parents, neighbors, religious practices, peers, schools, media, literature, and artifacts are only few examples of the forces that create or help shape the identity of individuals. Just as it is important to examine the cultural impact that lies behind students' literacy practices, it is also imperative to examine how different kinds of identities also influence students' habits of learning and how students choose to present themselves. Among the many kinds of identities discussed in literature, this study will focus on the cultural, social, and positional identities, since students project these identities in every-day

interactions. In addition, cultural, social, and positional identities embody the most salient aspects that characterize the development of students' literacy (Janks, 2010).

***Cultural identity.*** Certain characteristics like language, appearance, attire, and traditional and ritual practices characterize individuals as part of an ethnic group and become common traits that distinguish these individuals collectively. Committing to these distinctive behaviors is what constitutes an individual's cultural identity. In this sense, cultural identity refers to an individual's membership in an ethnic group with distinguishable behaviors, such as Arabic, Indian, or American. Kim (2007) explains that cultural identity is characterized by the communal nature of the group such as similar life patterns, practices, and artifacts that imply a mutual tradition and common future. Hence, the cultural identity of people encompasses a history of learned and practiced behaviors, patterns of communications, thinking and believing. Adopting and internalizing these behaviors, customs, and values of the culture of the group is what makes a cultural identity as Ferdman (1990) explains.

Ferdman (1990) believes that paying attention to cultural differences might help educators realize and interpret students' behavior differently: For instance, an assimilationist would relate a quiet student's attitude in class to individual traits like intelligence, home environment or motivation; whereas a pluralist may look at the same behavior as a characteristic of the ethnic group in general (p. 192). Similarly, students may display culturally-specific behaviors that might either hinder or support academic performance and communications at schools.

Cultural identity develops within the system and institutions that surround individuals. Nieto (2010) and Gomez-Estern et al. (2010) indicate that an individual's cultural identity is situated in institutional life where culture resides. Institutional life could be the formal

institutions like schools, universities, companies, or the institution of marriage, of being single, of friendship, and/or of family. Hence, these institutions influence and develop individuals' cultural identity which in turn might impact their literacy practices in particular and their life in general. In one study in which they interview graduate students, Haley, Jaeger, and Levin (2014) looked at decisions made by students of diverse backgrounds regarding their future careers. They found that cultural identity had an impact on the general decisions that the students made regarding their future career goals and on specific decisions of whether to become university faculty and stay within the community boundaries. Students' decisions were influenced by a tendency to rise to family expectations and were based upon family perspectives, needs, and affiliations in the community. This study reflected how cultural identity can influence the lives of individuals and the choices they make.

Cultural identity may be altered by relations of power and exposure to different groups. As they emigrate, individuals maintain their affiliation with their beliefs, homes, families, jobs, relationships, previous associations, language and institutions which constitute their cultural identity (Ferdman, 1990). Nonetheless, a cultural identity does not remain constant. In the new land, these new immigrants will be interacting with other groups with 'different' cultural identities which causes their identities to develop and evolve successively. Smith (1998) explains that identity is formed by identifying with other groups which he calls "clubs". He also adds that our identity changes as we learn to talk, dress, behave, and conduct ourselves like the members of that social group (p.11). Relatedly, Gee (2012) explains that "A change of discourse practices is a change of identity" (p.719). This means that once individuals become exposed to and learn new ways of behaving, talking, and doing then their cultural identities extend to new social identities.

***Social identity: groups and discourses.*** Social identity is a symbolic construct that refers to the different social, categorical classifications like gender and race classification (Ferdman, 1990) along with social clubs, environments, and groups and so on. Extended families are part of the social identity of immigrant students. Moll and colleagues (2005) drew attention to the impact that the rich resources of the home and community- like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and the extended family relations- have on students' education. In their study, Moll and Reyes (2008) examined the role of parents and caretakers in Mexican families and found that surrounding family members play a huge role in shaping children's education and building their unique experiences. Moll and Reyes referred to this social circle as a "constellation of social activities" that aids students' literacy, like going to the store, visiting relatives, reading the mail, attending parties and participating in family festivals. The opportunities to participate in these literacy events provide children with different linguistic spaces, which aid the development of their literacy. Moll and Reyes's study emphasized the importance of the rich social surroundings of children and the context in which children's literacy develops, which presents a distinct frame from the formal literacy of the classroom. Similarly, Katz (1991) described a 'cadre of social agents' that are considered socializing agents which form students' social identity and thus influence the children's literacy. Those 'social agents' consist of immediate people within the family along with community people around the child that give meaning to their experiences. In these two studies, the agents were referred to as "family capital" (Coleman, 1988), a kind of asset that children are surrounded with and which can occur in three forms: physical, human, and social assets.

Coleman (1988) identified three elements in the backgrounds of families that he called "capital" (p. 16) and which he posits contribute to students' achievement at school. First, the

physical capital, which is the family's financial capital (income) that provides physical resources for children. Second, he identified human capital, which represents the parents' level of education, which increases the probability that children will be surrounded by a rich cognitive environment. Third, he wrote about the social capital, represented by the role adults play in the life of the child in the family. Coleman placed special attention on the latter form of capital since it is the most important as it undergirds the other two capitals. Hence, within families' backgrounds, social capital is of great importance and it is represented in relationships among children, parents, other adults in the families, and it also extends to include the members of the community. These relations among persons and establishments in the society form an individual's social identity.

Based on Coleman's theory of capital, Li (2007) conducted a study on four Chinese families in Canada and revealed that the role of the physical/financial capital diminished in comparison to the human capital and the social associations to which parents subscribed. Li identified decisions parents made as to what books to purchase and utilizing public resources like libraries. The educated choices of parents were more beneficial and provided better educational opportunities for children than the physical capital alone which at some point was not the appropriate resource to help children develop literacy. This study concluded that parental human capital was central to students' success in school, and it was considered a form of identity that was rich with resources that could help students succeed.

Similarly, in their research with Mexican families, Moll and colleagues (2005) identified three levels of an individual's social identity: physical- (the immediate environment where a student lives like the house setting, decorations, and garden), human- (the caregivers' roles, family history and social networks like the family education level, labor history, its roots,

affiliations and connections in the community), and recreational- (the daily routines like gardening, music practice, reading, sports, and shopping). Moll and colleagues (1998) referred to all of these as “funds of knowledge”, indicating that such experiences could enrich the school performance of Mexican students and serve as resources for educators to tap into. Both Li’s (2007) study and that of Moll and colleagues were rooted in the concept of family capital and revealed the rich assets of the culture that are unnoticed most of the time.

In addition to the concept of capital and individuals’ associations, social identity could also include individuals’ Discourses- their ways of saying, doing, thinking, and valuing (Gee, 1990). Thus, valuing friendships, helping other individuals, respect for elders, and obedience to parents and other elderly members of the family represent elements of an individual’s social identity that are culture-specific. Janks (2010) states that “As individual human subjects enter into new discourses they acquire alternative and additional ways of being in the world- that is new social identities” (p.25). This means that as students come into American schools, their identities are changing socially as they become parts of other groups- (or not). Therefore, it is important to look at how students’ social identity affects their literacy practices and how they conduct themselves at school as a projection of their social identity. On the other hand, investigating the types of capital, whether physical, human, or recreational, that students possess and which types of these capitals are being recognized at school would help develop a foundation for educating children and building a bridge to reach the immigrant families of those students. In this sense, in this research, it becomes important to examine social identity and the forms of capital that Arabic students possess.

***Positional identity: A person’s frame of reference.*** The idea of positional identity is how individuals attempt to position themselves among the group- how others view them for

who they are or regardless of who they really are, and at the same time, how they view others based on certain behaviors and physical attributes that those people display. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) looked at positional identity in everyday life as constructed by cultural and conventional events. They suggest that institutions and interactions with various people mark individuals and play a role in forming who they are: “Positional selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts- tax forms, census categories, curriculum vitae, and the like” (p.26). This reflects that a positional identity is a combination of how individuals are formally identified through social institutions, situate themselves in regards to this identification, and are viewed by others based on such information. In addition to the categorizations of formal institutions, there are the physical traits like color, ethnicity and age which also situate individuals in relation to their environments. These physical traits matter in everyday interactions, impact students’ literacy, and affect how students position themselves and are being positioned by others (McCarthy and Moje, 2002).

In a yearlong ethnography, Athanases (1998) researched how ethnically diverse, urban 10<sup>th</sup> grade students used their positional identities with texts. Athanases’s observations and interviews showed that students found many connections between literature and their personal experiences and family lives, backgrounds, gender, and membership of certain ethnic groups. Reading varied literature also helped students understand other diverse groups. By understanding others, students were better able to understand themselves and situate themselves in literature and in life which is how their positional identities were created.

Similarly, in a ten-year ethnographic study of inner-city minority families, Compton-Lilly (2012) documented how students developed positional identities based on unintentional signals delivered by teachers through their instructional methods. For example, as the teacher

moved quickly in the lesson, students who were not able to catch up attributed the reason to their not being smart. Other students referred to how teachers demanded doing things ‘right now’ in class without taking time to guide students on what needed to be accomplished. Such simple behaviors on the teacher’s side of not providing students with ample time to complete tasks made struggling students in the classroom feel ‘disgusted’ about school and teachers (p.60-61). These citations from Compton-Lilly’s study exemplify how teachers’ behaviors sometimes were responsible for the formation of positional identities in students who positioned themselves as incapable of functioning successfully in class. At the same time, teachers’ personalities, behaviors, and teaching practices positioned them from the perspectives of students. For example, students described their favorite and unpopular teachers: Favorite teachers were those that were funny and made learning interesting and used games. Unpopular teachers were those that were boring and gave work to fill in time (p. 69).

It is not strictly that the behaviors of teachers that develop students’ positional identities. Sometimes the language of teachers also creates positional identities in the classroom as Hall (2005) found in a year-long study of struggling eighth-grade readers. In this study, Hall looked at how teachers used language to position their students in the classroom by identifying them as poor or strong readers. This act influenced students’ current and developing identities, which in turn influenced their reading practices at school. Relying on class observations and interviews, Hall found that the teachers used language to position their students as certain kind of learners depending on the attitudes and literacy practices they had in the classroom. By classifying the students as good or poor readers according to the teachers’ criteria, teachers created students’ positional identities and this influenced students’ beliefs about who they were or could become as readers (p. 8). These studies (Athanasios, 1998; Compton-Lilly, 2012; and

Hall, 2005) reflect how school and literacy instruction may create students' positional identities in relation to their surroundings, whether it was the teachers causing the development of positional identities in students, or students developing their positional identity as a reaction to a certain behavior by teachers or classmates.

In the same sense Gee (2012) talked about positional identity as being recognized as a certain member with the characteristics of the crowd which makes a person part of the group or not (p.3). Gee alluded to the biker's bar example to draw attention to how people position themselves and are being positioned according to individuals' interaction, speaking, and the relationship between what they do and say. According to Gee, in a bar, you cannot say to a leather-jacketed and heavily-tattooed man something like, "May I please have a match for my cigarette?" Even though the statement is grammatically correct, it is still not used in the right context. Similarly, if you do ask the right question in the right context, but behave differently, such as wipe the stool so that you do not get your designer jeans dirty, for example, then you are still doing the wrong thing. Therefore, an individual's way of dressing, speaking, and following the rules of discourse might include or exclude a person in a group according to Gee (2012). In the case of immigrant students, learning a language must be accompanied with students' 'doing right' and learning to conduct themselves according to the norms established by the new culture, when appropriate. If they are unable to code-switch between home and school Discourses at the appropriate times, teachers and classmates might position them or they might be positioning themselves as different from the group, as shown in Hall's (2005) study.

Similarly, when Li (2008) examined the home literacy practices of one Vietnamese family among other diverse families, she explained how, at school, students with an 'ethnic' Asian look and name were treated differently, which made them prefer to only befriend students

from the same culture that understood their language and did not make fun of them (p. 85). In this case, the students did not conform to the school discourse, neither did the school encourage multiculturalism. Such physical attributes along with subscribed behaviors created a positional identity for the Vietnamese students at schools that influenced their self-esteem and self-perceptions and at sometimes resulted in the students functioning in a separate sphere at school.

Similarly, in her case-study research of Puerto Rican families, Compton-Lilly (2007) established that the students fell victim to the “symbolic violence directed at individuals who maintain cultural and linguistic ways of being” (p.94). In this case, characteristics such as skin color, behavior, and ethnic language were factors that created a positional classroom identity for one of the students by his teacher and limited his chances of success. Whereas the other student’s embodiment of school-valued ways of being like speaking English, following the classroom rules, and accepting the teacher’s assessment of her worth made her ‘look’ more successful despite her lack of progress in reading. So in effect, both students were impacted negatively by positioning by the teacher—the first student was written off and positioned as failing from the very beginning because he did not use the school Discourse, whereas the second used the school Discourse, which blinded the teacher to academic issues that warranted attention. These studies (Compton-Lilly, 2007; Hall, 2005; and Li, 2008) reflect how the formation of a positional identity might impact the attitudes, behaviors, and achievement of students.

Positional identities are also used to reframe an individual to a particular frame of meaning, or to a certain world (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). According to Holland and colleagues, people employ their positional identity as a scaffold- a point of reference- to help define their experiences and who they are by how they interact with things

and people around them. This point of reference gives accreditation to their positions and experiences. Holland and colleagues (1998) used the example of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings at which individuals tell their stories about their former lives as alcoholics. These stories are revalued because they represent experience that is appraised within the larger frame of reference: “They become the cultural resource that mediates members’ identities as “non-drinking alcoholics” (p.52). Similarly, immigrant students bring their stories with them about their former lives, which situate them in the new land and serve as their accounted knowledge and experience. These stories, experiences and previous practices represent frames of reference to immigrant students, which position them in the classrooms among other classmates. These experiences help define immigrant students within the bigger circle they have ascribed around themselves in their new environment.

In summary, identity has roots that extend from culture and ethnicity. People derive their identities from their environments and they project them (either consciously or subconsciously) in their daily interactions with others. These identities become their frame of reference, and at the same time a way that others view them.

Considering identities is important to this research since taking into account students’ cultural, social, and positional identities means looking at who students really are, what motivates them, and why they display certain kinds of behaviors. It also means considering their cultural and social practices that influence their learning. Students’ identities influence their practices and dictate how they handle themselves in and out of school. Therefore, when looking at the capitals embedded in students’ home environments, it is also important to examine students’ identities since these identities represent an extension of students’ cultural practices.

### **Students' Experiences Count and are Rich Resources**

The educational system in Michigan often views immigrant students that could possess a wealth of experiences with a negative lens, particularly via the official terms used to describe them. In fact, English learners are referred to as “Limited English Proficient Students” (LEP) in federal and state legal documents (MDE, 2013). In addition, the Michigan Department of Education adopted the No Child Left Behind (2003) definition of an English learner (EL) to identify any student who is aged 3 through 21 and was not born in the United States, who comes from an environment where “a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency” (p. 8), and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English would “impede him/her from passing State assessments, hinder the student’s ability to function successfully in classrooms where instruction is delivered in English, and stands in the way of the student’s being a full member of the society” (MDE, p.8).

While this provides a definition of an English learner, it projects a description that is charged with negative connotations (limited, impede, and difficulties) and restrictions, and does not recognize past skills, abilities, talents and experiences of students. The definition denies immigrant children any past experiences, means of communication, or valuable skills and focuses only on speaking, reading and writing in English. All students’ assets including their biliteracy are silenced and therefore devalued in the face of the demand to acquire English proficiency. Thus, the culture in schools tends to devalue the heritage language which then can give students the feeling of inadequacy and deficiency since there is only one measurement for success: reading and writing in English.

Nevertheless, more and more current research is arguing against such a paradigm of deficiency. There is ample research in the field that demonstrates the richness of the immigrant students' backgrounds, the abundance of their experiences, and the positive impact of the home environments on students' development of literacy. The purpose of this section is to emphasize the noteworthiness of the studies in the field which exhibit how students' background experiences can be a wealthy resource in their education. This section is anchored by three major ethnographic studies in literature: Compton-Lilly (2012), Heath (1983, 2012), and Li (2008). The following literature review is divided into three parts: the first part presents important research in the field that highlights the significance of students' social and cultural practices. The second part looks at the research that reflects how cultural, social, and positional identities of students are factors that impact their literacy and are always present in the classroom, yet sometimes not noticed or utilized. And the third part sums up the literature in the field on the relationship between culture, literacy and identity.

**Literacy is embedded in social and cultural practices of groups.** Since literacy does not occur in a void, we cannot separate it from the social context in which it occurs (Goodman, 1996). Students' identities affect literacy since identities are a product of the culture; "Identities are social constructions that shape students' literacy" (McCarthy and Moje, 2002, p. 6). In order for learning to happen, it is important for children to belong to a literate environment or club (Smith, 1997). Those 'clubs' help form individuals' social identity. Hence, identity is continuously interacting with the social and cultural aspects of individuals' lives and affecting students' literacy. Compton-Lilly (2006) showed how one student's disinterest in reading positioned him as a reluctant reader at school that required the intervention of a reading specialist. In her case study of an African American student, she revealed that the student's

cultural and media resources were not valued as a part of the formal literacy practices at his school. In order to help students develop their literacies, Compton-Lilly explained that educators must discover and utilize students' identities and cultural practices that encompass varied literacy resources. In the situation of the African-American student in the study, teachers could have tapped into the diverse resources grounded in his "childhood culture, media culture, and divergent literacy practices" (p.73), which were considered as a source of distraction and not to fit within a school setting. This study demonstrated that cultural tools, which are directly related to positional and social identities of children and which were disregarded by the school, could be considered significant literacy resources to utilize in the education of children. Here, the difference becomes clear between perceived illiteracy and students who are literate in a way that is not perceived by institutions.

Unlike Compton-Lilly's (2006) findings, Cordova and Matthiesen (2008) documented how teachers could invest in students' resources and cultural knowledge. Cordova and Matthiesen showed how one inner-city second-grade teacher created a space for her students' life experiences and prior knowledge to help support their in-school literacy. The researchers highlighted the power of teacher talk to support students' developing literacies inside and outside of school. In this study, the teacher used students' understanding of concepts based on their communities and cultures as a springboard to teach. Such a method proved to value students' lived experiences and use them as resources for learning. By integrating students' experiences into the curriculum, the teacher did not abandon the arbitrary school curriculum, but rather extended it to be more inclusive of the students' experiences. By doing so, the teacher filled in the cultural gaps in the rigid school curriculum which assigned the required readings to students. Such practice proved to be successful: on one side, the students learn the required

standards; and on the other hand, teaching proved to be more effective when it built on students' experiences.

Students of immigrant families will use their distinctive knowledge, literacies, and learned skills when given the opportunity to do so. In fact, Mui (2011) identified several characteristics of such strengths that constituted capital. These characteristics distinguished the literacy-rich family environment and cultural practices, which in turn helped immigrant students become more successful at school. When observing an Indo-Canadian family within a culturally diverse working class community in Canada, Mui found that print was abundant at home represented in displayed school projects, posters of academic concepts, memos and books. Social capital was visible at home in that all the extended family members of uncles and aunts lived collectively in the same huge house and shared responsibility of raising the children. The family valued their children's education, as illustrated by the fact that they preserved their children's past school assignments, projects, and notes stored in labeled boxes for each one. Literacy was visible in the children's play activities along with a variety of board games, in addition to structured, formal literacy practices similar to those practiced at school (e.g., worksheets and workbooks). Also, a great emphasis was placed on the heritage language that was part of the home conversations. Mui's study reflected the wealth of home resources and culture-specific activities that could be present in immigrant homes and argued that these home environments contributed to students' success at school and that, in general, teachers should not miss this family-rich environment, but should embed it in instruction to maximize the opportunities for immigrant children.

Family capital is not restricted to Asian groups or ELs. Similar to Mui's study, Johnson (2010) studied the family literacy practices and environment in African American minority

students. Drawing on the work of Heath (1983), Johnson looked into how an African American family within a small rural community practiced and participated in literacy. As documented in Moll and Reyes's (2008) work, Johnson found assets in the constellations of social activities and relationships that extended across several households, in contrast to European-American families which consisted of the nuclear family, only. Johnson learned that literacy was part of the family's everyday social, educational, spiritual, and financial practices, as well as entertainment. Such literacy practices included letter writing, managing household matters through budgeting and by reading specialized magazines, praying, and adult-child book reading. In addition, the family appreciated literacy and believed that literacy was empowering. Johnsons' findings were consistent with Mui's (2011) results about the benefits that children gain from connecting with extended families and the emphasis that these minority families placed on their children's education.

Immigrant students usually move between two worlds and incorporate life experiences that are diverse and unique into new situations which can lead them to academic success. Many studies (e.g., Cabrero, 2011; Danzak, 2011; Garcia, 2012; and Park, 2012) shed light on a significant strength in the lives of immigrant children which is that many students have the capability to maneuver between different worlds, realms, and territories in which their literacies are embedded.

In one study, Park (2013) demonstrated that success originated from students' past experiences. Park conducted a case-study of an African teenage girl that immigrated to New York to live with her aunt through the help of a literacy program in Guinea. Park observed, interviewed, and analyzed writing samples of his participant. The data collected documented that the student achieved academic success in the United States by drawing on her dual frame

of reference to navigate the realms of her two worlds: school and home, the new country and her home country. Crossing the two worlds helped her understand the contradictions and challenges between them and find ways for self-expression. In this study the student reflected on the knowledge, literacies, and academic tasks she learned in her home country to develop more awareness of the knowledge, literacies, and academic tasks of her new environment. This study, again, revealed how immigrant students can use resources from their backgrounds and build on strengths and past experiences to become successful and navigate their new environments.

Just like a strength of this African immigrant students was to navigate between her two worlds in Park's (2012) study, Danzak (2011) found a similar strength of English language learners. Upon analyzing thirty-two middle school students' graphic narratives, cultural practices of the students surfaced. If Park's students could virtually navigate between their two worlds, then Danzak's students physically and mentally crossed borders which enriched their experiences and gave them hybridity in addition to bilingualism, bicultural practices, and linguistic and cultural expressions. In this study, students produced graphic novels by researching their families' immigration stories, which helped them to express their cultural identities. This project provided cultural insights on the students' lives, empowered them, involved the collaboration between students and their parents at home as students interviewed their parents to know about the history of their immigration, gathered pictures, and had the chance to narrate their stories. This study reflected the assets available to children at home and within the cultural boundaries of the students' two worlds. The study calls upon the funds of knowledge that the researcher drew on in terms of the specialized knowledge that the families had as a resource—the content of the writing.

The theme of two worlds, cultures, or boundaries of immigrant children also emerged in Cabrero's (2011) work. She wanted to understand how high school students of Spanish heritage viewed their cultural and linguistic identities, and at the same time how teachers drew on the students' linguistic and cultural experiences to help them develop their literacy. By interviewing over a thousand participants, Cabrero found that students of immigrant families tended to live on double borderlands: their borderlands between their home environments and the school environment on one side, and on the other side the borders between their new country and their old country. Cabrero also found that some students had "trinalational/tricultural/tridialectal" affiliations based on their parents' backgrounds. Such rich backgrounds and experiences could have been used as the cornerstone of the students' education; however, teachers at school affixed negative labels to those students which limited students' performances, according to Cabrero.

In a similar study, Garcia (2012) observed how Latina adolescent writers used culturally relevant literature to shape their identities in an after school program. Participants in this study relied on their funds of knowledge and cultural capital to represent themselves and the two cultures they lived in: new one and home country culture. Their writings came to depict a strong sense of identity that represented a hybrid culture and described emotions of loss, belonging, and location that lingered between their old and new countries. This study also depicted how immigrant students tapped into two worlds and it also showed that when teachers adopted culturally responsive reading and writing, they uncovered their students' cultural and social identities which encouraged students to engage more and dip into their unique experiences and sense of being, especially when students were aware of their two milieus.

All the above studies acknowledged students' prior experiences along with their cultural expertise and they proved to work to the advantage of students and help them succeed with the help of their teachers. Whether African, Indo-Canadian, or of any other ethnicity, students became successful, as shown in the above studies, when they tapped into and recognized the richness and abundance of resources in their families that were not noticed at schools. Some of this wealth indicated that immigrant students were savvy in two worlds. Other aspects of their wealth were that students of immigrant families relied on the support of their extended families, their experiences, and the great emphasis their families placed on literacy.

The strengths of immigrant students are embedded in culturally-specific practices and skills that develop within their environments and which the educational system does not always recognize. Goodman (1996) referred to these by using the term *genre*, "a language form that develops within recurring social-cultural situations to meet the constraints of the speech acts or literacy events that commonly occur in those contexts" (p.21). Goodman's idea of genres is very similar to Gee's (1990, 2012) concept of Discourses since both present the notion of special knowledge that involves language in combination with other social practices. Because it requires time for immigrant students to become familiar with a new genre/Discourse, educators need to build on students' culture-specific practices in class until students learn the new ways in the new culture and system. Goodman explained how easily people can handle genres since they are used to them in everyday practices like reading the newspaper, shopping at the supermarket, or taking a multiple choice test. Yet, when people are not used to the new genres, they become more complex and require new learning such as reading an airplane ticket or browsing a different newspaper. In such cases, literacy would not be as effective as being familiar and immersed in the act itself. That is why attention must be given to how well

immigrant students function in their new environments and what kind of identity they display in their everyday interactions. Many times being unaccustomed to the new routines, context, or environments may be interpreted negatively by educators when dealing with English learners. This makes it important to examine the ways that students deal with different genres that diverse tasks require and how literacy practices, cultural factors, and identity formations influence students' academic achievement and which of these practices can be utilized to increase their achievement.

Goodman (1996) and Gee (1990-2012) are only two among many authors that discussed how literacy is embedded in the cultural and social contexts of groups and that educators have to build a bridge to connect the two worlds of school and home together. The strength of the home influence on the development of science literacy in children was a major factor in Solomon's (2003) study that explored how the home environment could impact the development of literacy and cultural awareness. Within the span of two years, Solomon conducted a study on twelve diverse families with different interests and educational backgrounds. The interviews and tape recordings of parents' literacy activities with their children revealed the presence of a microculture at home displayed by the different attitudes parents had towards the science project sent home by teachers: Some parents totally committed to the project, made it their priority, and took advantage of it to connect the home culture with school. Conversely, others gave it a moderate attention, while some did not invest in it at all. Solomon drew attention to how students' home identities differed from the ones they had at school and how teachers must try to attend to those different identities to help students succeed: "Some children remain quiet and almost unidentifiable in school for many months or even years. In the end they all build up a second identity for special use at school, one that marks

them as good or clever or naughty” (p. 27). Solomon affirmed that the science projects carried out at home revealed that children tended to speak more at home while learning, bonded more with parents, and helped bridge the gap between school and home. Solomon’s study sustained that homes could be a special place rich in supportive resources that could help bridge the differences between the school and home cultures since learning in this project extended from school to home and incorporated the family to invest in the project using their skills, knowledge, and extending the homework to include discussions and comparisons to their cultures such as when one Nigerian parent took the opportunity to tell her son about the importance of rain in her part of Nigeria. In this project, the strength of the home influence on the development of science literacy in children was huge. This research reflected how home environment could be a factor in developing literacy and cultural awareness.

The ways parents ‘do’ literacy with their children at home, along with their social and cultural values, impact the literacy of their children and affect their academic performance at school. In two longitudinal ethnographic studies, Heath (1983, 2012) explored the cultural literacy practices in three communities within the same geographic area: Trackton- the Black working class people, Roadville- the White working class people, and the Townspeople- the middle class people who owned the local mills. Each community demonstrated cultural differences in its uses of language, which impacted their children’s performance at school. When the Townspeople modeled reading for their children for various purposes and in many ways, they allowed their children to “acquire the habits of talk associated with written materials, and they used appropriate behavior for either cooperative negotiation of meaning in book reading episodes or story creation before they are themselves readers”, habits and behaviors that closely mirror those that are valued in schools. (Heath, 1983, p. 256). However, literacy

practices in Trackton and Roadville were different from the practices of the Townspeople as well the practices found in formal educational settings, such as school. Their literacy practices allowed spontaneous, fanciful stories which can link stories but could not transfer characters, times, or places. Also, their children were unfamiliar with questions that ask for a strict recounting of facts and when they wrote stories, they failed to set the scene or characters. Therefore, in each culture, the “different ways children learned to use language were dependent on the ways in which each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization” (p.11). This study demonstrated that middle-class children often come to school prepared with the linguistic skills and communicative patterns that would make them successful because their literacy practices were similar to those of the American middle class. Whereas, the Trackton and Roadville communities, whose children had different ways with words, may become underachievers in American education because the practices they bring to schooling do not closely align with or easily transfer to the practices valued within the school.

Heath’s (1983) study established that different practices at the family level contributed differently to children’s performance at school. Specific literacy practices such as talking, playing, and encouraging children to learn from practical sources in their environment were all considered forms of home literacy practices, and occurred in some way within all three communities. However, it is not the quantity of talk that made a difference in the lives of the children but the kind of talk. Heath concluded that success at schools required maneuvering contexts and creating connections among texts and ongoing social activities that related to school content which results in transitioning students smoothly to school.

Two decades later, Heath (2012) found that the same families' literacy practices had evolved. Their practices were altered by geographic expansion and relationships which extend beyond the immediate environment to include the neighborhood, community and around the globe. Community resources also expanded in two decades to include schools, museums, zoos, exhibitions, after-school activities, and community organizations. Another impact on children's literacy was the human resources or "intimate strangers" (p. 49) which included an array of people like nannies, coaches, choir members, and other community members that children are in interaction with. Those "intimate strangers" helped stretch students' languages, values, interests, and contexts beyond what their parents could offer. Those community members, through their interactions, offered children their professional identity along with out-of-school experiences that enabled children to feel the hierarchy and responsibility of the real world and prepared them to function successfully in the real world (p. 50).

Heath's classic ethnographic research is of great importance to this study since my study focuses on the home literacy practices of immigrant families that are culturally specific from the perspective of the parents, children, and teachers. Heath's first study helps highlight which of the home practices are valued most in the educational system and could lead to increased student achievement and which are not. In the second study, Heath exited the immediate home environment and looked at the children in interaction with the wider communities as a whole where she documented several resources that expanded the children's literacy practices. Both of these types of research come to bear on the present study as evidence to substantiate the rich environment that surrounded students outside the school and enriched their experiences.

Thus, literacy is socially contextualized and is marked by unique and different social and cultural practices of peoples. Gee (2012), Janks (2010), and The New London Group (2000)

emphasized the sociocultural aspect of literacy. The New London Group discussed literacy as a “situated practice” which necessitates an “immersion in a community of learners” as a condition for it to develop. A community of learners can be formed by any group that practices literacy and is not strictly limited to schools or formal institutions. The New London Group emphasized the nature of the human knowledge as “primarily situated in sociocultural settings and heavily contextualized in specific knowledge domains and practices” (p.31) whether these domains are formal or informal settings (i.e., whether learning takes place at home or school). What The New London Group referred to is that literacy is the product of interactions among groups within a meaningful social context.

There is an Arabic adage that says: “Tell me who you mingle with and I can tell you who you are.” This emphasizes that individuals develop literacies from groups they associate with, and how communities shape individuals’ character and mold their identities. Our identity forms as we affiliate with groups of people and that is what constitutes our learning (Smith, 1998). Smith adds that a student’s identity is “something to be learned, and they learn it from their observation of the people around them, the company they keep, in the clubs they join, from the people they take for granted they are like” (p.17). The following section looks at studies in the literature that reveal how students bring different identities to school with them and how this affects their learning.

**Enactment of cultural, positional, and social identities.** Cultural and social formations display themselves in practices of immigrant families and create specific cultural, positional, and social identities that leave their trace on students’ literacy and academic performance. In her ethnographic study Li (2008) investigated four culturally diverse urban families and examined their cultural identity formations along with their literacy practices then

contrasted those families' practices with two white families in the same underclass neighborhoods. Li found that parents' cultural beliefs influenced the literacy practices of the immigrant families. The findings revealed that all parents had high expectations for their children and every family expected one of the children to become a doctor- mainly the oldest son in the family- so they financially, physically, and emotionally invested in their children's education. Li also found that parental beliefs and cultural values displayed themselves in children such as different gender roles, behaviors and expectations. Such practices (as in the examples below) formed the children's positional identities which categorized them differently from their peers at school and influenced their self-perception as well as how others viewed them.

Li also discovered that parents' non-mainstream cultural identities were also an obstacle in reaping the expected results from their children's education. For example, the cultural minority parents did not understand how the American schooling system worked. They believed that their children's American schools failed to promote the value of education in students because children did not take school seriously the way they did in their home country. Furthermore, children's home literacy practices were influenced by the parents' cultural beliefs, race, gender and class. For example, Li found that parents were apprehensive toward their new environments –concerned about gangs and drugs, so they restrained their children's interaction in the neighborhood instead of embracing the resources of the community and educating their children about their fears like the white families did by discussing gangs, sex, and drugs at the dinner table to immunize their children against this vile part of the society. In contrast, the white families performed different literacy habits: In addition to writing e-mails and letters to family members, books were available everywhere in the house, and they visited the public library.

The white families watched T.V. together and family movies. They did not remain stuck at home, but went out and did a lot of activities in the community, took vacations together, and were involved at school (PTO, annual International Festival, and school plays).

Li's study (2008) demonstrated how different kinds of identities and specific cultural practices influenced the children's literacy (negatively and positively) and distinguished the immigrant families from the mainstream families thus limiting the opportunities the immigrant children had. The study also demonstrated how the parents' beliefs, values, and ethnic backgrounds created their children's social, positional, and cultural identities due to the influence of their home traditions. For example, "distrust" was a theme that emerged in the Sudanese parents' behaviors of not allowing their female children to visit friends from school at their homes, thus limiting the daughters' social circles. Also, the insecurity of the Sudanese family upon feeling uprooted from their supportive environment in their home country created a feeling of unhappiness and mistrust. Another observed specific cultural influence in the Vietnamese family was the strict discipline and high expectations for the children since they were anticipated to be the sole providers for their parents in the future. This made the parents invest in their children's education and influenced the decisions they made, such as refusing to allow their children to work during high school in order to give them more time to focus on their studying. Li's study also reflected the presence of cultural identity as she examined how immigrant families valued their extended family in how they contributed to raising the children. Li also marked how families immersed their children with stories about their lives in their home country in an attempt to inculcate the children with their native culture.

All these examples of specific cultural behaviors such as differing gender roles, limited social circles, insecurity in the new country, and frustration with the educational system had an

impact on the students' school performance as Li (2008) documented. The students in this study developed positional identity which marginalized them at school and prevented them from reaching their full potential. In addition, the clash between the home environment and school was great with each representing a different set of values and practices. This ethnographic study is of particular importance to my research since I will examine similar factors that result in the formation of the identities of students and how these identities display themselves and impact the literacy of Arabic students.

Within the literature there is a myriad of studies that investigate the relationships between students' positional, cultural, and social identities and link them to school and homes of immigrant students, minority students, and their families. In Collins' study (2004) participants learning English were at the college level, but they proved to be more successful and motivated when the projects they did invoked their expertise as bilingual and bicultural individuals. This study required that students get involved with their immediate environments by writing a biography after interviewing a relative. Results indicated that students with limited English were capable of complex academic tasks when given the opportunity to build on their previous knowledge and assets available in their home environment for that task (i.e., to use academic literacy in a social context and relate it to their social/cultural identities). Thus, social identity impacted the development of students' literacy in this study.

In addition to the impact of social identity on literacy, cultural identity plays part in students' educations as well. Sutherland (2005) looked at six, high school, black, middle-class girls in an honors English class in which students responded to texts they read by writing and engaging in small group discussions in a club that met after school. Upon looking at how studying literature by and about African American women shaped her participants' identity,

Sutherland reported that the participants were positioned by a Eurocentric view of beauty. For example, discussions about black dolls revealed opinions that white dolls were prettier, or opinions that dark skin was unattractive even for a model. Similar discussions also revealed how the Eurocentric view of beauty prevented black participants from seeing beyond it. Additionally, other opinions surfaced, such as of one black participant of being aware of having white friends and how she compared them with other black girls at school. On the other hand, the discussions of literature revealed how participants were surrounded by the social boundaries of being black, which implied how others thought of them and how they should behave. Their cultural identity as “black” included behaviors such as being defiant, smart-mouthed, and unruly, which was reflected in their behaviors as well. Positional identity was also visible in Sutherland’s study in that being black, female, and from a certain part of the city indicated a specific social class that was faced by negativity from other black girls. However, the participants’ were aware that their behaviors reflected a white way of acting that was necessary to achieve academic success like writing in proper English and letting go of the vernacular in their speech which made them stand out from their friends at school. So their behaviors contradicted their performance. This study showed how literature played a role in making African American students realize their positional and cultural identities. Sutherland also found that participants got the chance through literature to shape their reality in a way where they could represent their true identities; for example, the participants identified themselves as black; a combination of Latina, black and Indian; and African American. Thus the literature they read helped the participants assert their positional and cultural identities as they viewed them and not as the participants were labeled by others. The students’ readings created a window where

participants could realize, express, and explore their different identities which were present but never explored in class discussions before.

Cultural identity is substantially present in students' learning and can be a positive part of a school atmosphere. In fact it can enrich students' education. In her research on two-after-school programs, Kelly (2012) found that immigrant students could actively invest their situated language and daily literacy practices in their learning. The program was developed to provide support to Spanish-speaking students and students at-risk through a program in which middle school students collaborated to produce a series of short films. Through various ethnographic tools, three themes emerged: cultural identity, groups and networks, and space and boundaries. First, students' cultural identity emerged as they tapped into their specific cultural practices as individuals to depict a "culture of gossip" – the theme of the film. For example, English learners enhanced the film they produced along with other mainstream students by using a cultural lens and approaching the problem of gossip from a unique mindset. They present the central idea of the film as they usually see it in their community, along with enriching it with Spanish script which made it look more plausible. Second, students exchanged social and cultural resources with other students from diverse backgrounds which allowed them to learn from one another and to appreciate and build good relations with their peers. For example, ELs and mainstream students cooperated together to write, act, direct, and reproduce the project. The study helped students' cultural identity surface in the school setting. In this study, Kelly reflected that students who were limited in English and enrolled in a self-contained ESL classroom during the day were able to contribute and enrich a school project about bullying by building on their knowledge. In this case cultural identity contributed positively to learning.

Cultural identity and its direct relation to learning was also the focus of Rodriguez (2006), who believed that creating a strong cultural identity at school would increase parental involvement and thus students' success. Rodriguez engaged parents of fourth-grade, inner city Latino children, by assigning students poems translated into Spanish, the parents' first language, to be read and discussed with parents at home. This research yielded positive results: First, parents were able to exercise their unique knowledge to interpret poetry by utilizing their cultural knowledge and heritage language to understand the poems. Second, parents and students started utilizing the local bookstore and library to complement school work, and they sought relatives' help also. The results identified the parents' cultural and social capital represented in the networks in their communities and that helped advance their children's learning. It is clear in both of these studies (Kelly, 2012; Rodriguez, 2006) that cultural identity- the specific cultural knowledge that students developed from home- established the starting point for students to realize their cultural identity instead of leaving it at the classroom door. In both studies, the teachers were aware that students possessed this capital and they helped students use it by unlocking their cultural identities, embracing the home culture of the students, and uncovering the valuable assets of students.

Immigrant or minority students often realize that classroom assignments of reading and writing are standards-based, and typically do not include topics of cultural diversity (Muhammad, 2012). Muhammad generally looked into how sixteen girls, all immigrants, between the age of eleven and seventeen, used literacy to express their identities in writing within an urban writing institute, but she specifically studied one sixteen-year old black girl as a focal participant. In her interviews, Muhammad explored how the participant presented her identity and made sense of herself in the classroom among her classmates. Muhammad reported

that the participant's culture and ethnic identity as a black female surfaced, as well as other traits like gender, kinship, and resiliency when the structure of the writing institute gave her the chance to express herself. The participant also expressed that classroom writing was aligned to the standards which urged her to conceal her real identity, detach herself from the topic, and produce prescribed writing. The afternoon writing program helped the participant reveal her own voice and make meaning of her identity since her writings were all connected to a black history. For example, at the same time that the participant expressed her opinion against the stereotypes of black girls in the afternoon writing program, she concealed her opinions as she wrote in class to meet the expectations of teachers and thus concealed her true identity. So, her cultural identity was not explored in the classroom the same way it was in the after-school writing program, which helped her to make meaning of her cultural identity.

Similarly, in a year-long after school program, Hall and Piazza (2009) marked that African American boys' interpretations of texts were influenced by the students' social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and experiences. Students' cultural identities influenced their understandings of what it meant to be a male, such as concepts about boys being void of tender emotions. Their cultural identities were reflected in their understandings of how males behave in that the students rejected some characters in the books that did not fit into their concept of masculinity, like boys depicted wearing pink, or boys who had a girl for a friend. On the other hand, students' social identities surfaced as they favored books that fell under their understandings of what it meant to be boys through the characters they read about and that depicted them as black boys, which indicated that students were aware of their black color and their physical features as African Americans. Similarly, students' positional identities were revealed by the boys' acceptance of the dominant structures at school and the positions they

were assigned to; for example, realizing that all boys could be discriminated against and bullied, and that they should defend themselves when this happened affected their social positioning. This study showed how literature had the power to unearth the social, cultural, and positional identity that students possess.

So far we have seen how cultural identity is one element that is present in students that shapes their literacy experience at school and impacts students' academic achievement and how they understand things. I have also discussed how positional identity impacts students in the ways in which they situate themselves in different settings. Now, we will look at how teachers, intentionally or unintentionally, might contribute to developing the positional identity of students.

In examining the cultural identity and literacy practices of eighth-grade, immigrant Latino students, Honeyford (2010) explored the results of incorporating lesson plans that recognized and invited students' cultural identities into the classroom. The observations, field notes and interviews with teachers and students indicated that some of the Latino students tended to maintain their ethnic names because they represented their cultural identity even though those names positioned them as separate from their classmates and created tensions for them in class. In addition to substantiating their cultural identities through their ethnic names, students' writings expressed their movement across social and cultural times and spaces. Students' writing samples included representations of larger networks of people, activities, and things that extended to include the past, present and future along with an appreciation and pride for their community, families, and themselves – practices which reflected their cultural identity.

In a similar study, Brown (2011) examined second-grade students in a European-American dominant school for nine months, interviewing parents, teachers, and students to

investigate how students' identities developed in the classroom. Brown found that teachers could project certain images of themselves during their interactions with ELLs and that the ways students were positioned by teachers impacted their perceptions of themselves as well as their peers' perceptions of their academic and social abilities. Brown found that without realizing it, the teacher sometimes projected their stereotypes onto students. In the study, the teacher's Discourse sent negative messages, despite the fact that she had good intentions. For example, even though the teacher appreciated one student's language and culture, she never read aloud any books that used Spanish vocabulary and Spanish books were absent from her class library. The teacher's attitude sent implicit messages that the students' culture and language were not as valuable as English, which impacted the students' positional identity, as Brown documented. This study echoes the findings of other studies discussed previously (Athanases, 1998; Compton-Lilly, 2012; Hall, 2005) which emphasize that teachers' behaviors, whether intended or not, led to creating a positional identity in their students.

The same findings were documented by Cummins, Chow, and Schechter (2006) as they looked for a context for newcomer students at school to demonstrate their skills by exposing their multilingual and multicultural abilities, valuing them, and building on them in an elementary class. Since the context of the research was to create dual-language books, the researchers involved parents with translating and recording the books for students which paved the way for them participating in other ways at school, such as doing secretarial work to meet the needs of other immigrant families. Interviews with parents revealed the differences in literacy practices among immigrant families: many parents read books and told their children stories in two languages, whereas 13% only read books in one language. Also, findings revealed how teachers developed positional identities for their students through the interactions with

them: when teachers ignored students' cultures and heritage languages in instruction in the classroom, they sent a message to students "with respect to their identities and who they are expected to be and become in the classroom" (p.304). This positional identity on the teachers' side reflected the kind of society they see students graduating into- a monolingual dominant society. Whereas when teachers integrated students' first language into class instruction and encouraged it, they communicated a different message with students about their identities. In each case, teachers' attitude towards students' native language communicated a message which set the tone of the teachers' positional identity and students picked the vibe.

In addition to how teachers might contribute to developing the positional identity of students, students' behaviors, beliefs, and practices can also be factors in developing their positional identities in class. Witteborn (2007) found that adult Arab immigrants used their ethnicity and their religion to position themselves and others in class. Witteborn attended a variety of Arab community following fifty-three Arabic participants in the United States to determine how they used identity labels to express their collective identities in social interactions. Witteborn revealed that Arab immigrants used their ethnicity and religion to position themselves while speaking. For example, the order of identification as an Arab, Iraqi, and Shi'ite meant that they looked at their ethnicity, country of origin, and then sect of religion when defining their "selves". That identification represented a signifier that was associated with a political and social classification. In other words, with each identity label, the participants revealed a further positional identity as they spoke. Witteborn concluded that Arab immigrants in his study used different identities depending on the social, political, and religious situation. For example, they used "Arab identification" in social situations to express their cultural identity and "Arab-American identification" as their sociopolitical identity which showed that

Arabic immigrants were not a monolithic group with a unified pattern of communication. This study reflected how Arab immigrants identified themselves, how others identified them and how this affected their social interactions (positional identity). In all the above studies (Brown, 2009; Hall & Piazza, 2009; Honeyford, 2010; Witteborn 2007) the impact of the presence of positional identity was observed in the classroom, from the teacher's side or from the students and their families' side.

Cultural beliefs and practices are a major factor in creating children's identities which in turn influence their literacy and academic success. In all the above studies, students' abilities sprung from within, from what characterized them as individuals- their identities (Collins, 2004; Kelly, 2012; Li, 2008). And in every study there was evidence of cultural factors that characterized students' identities. The studies also showed that students developed positional identities related to behaviors displayed by teachers (Brown, 2011; Cummins, Chow, & Schecter, 2006). However, students tended to be more involved at school and their learning was maximized when teachers acknowledged and tapped into students' ideologies, principles, values, practices, and beliefs that implied students' cultural and social identities (Collins, 2004; Sutherland, 2005). This means that students' cultural, social, and positional identities, when acknowledged, helped improve their achievement and participation in class (Honeyford, 2010). Unfortunately, as noted in the studies, those practices were often conducted outside the realm of the regular school day, like in afterschool or summer programs, likely because schools were either oblivious to students' assets, unprepared to utilize them, or they were too busy meeting the demands of a rigorous curriculum (Kelly, 2012; Muhammad, 2012). Realizing the different identities that students bring to school every day means paying attention to characteristics of their homes and cultures since those identities sprung from there and were affected by home

practices first (Hall & Piazza, 2009). The last section demonstrates the relationship between culture, literacy and identity and how they are directly connected with families and communities.

**Families, identity, and literacy in action.** From the sociocultural perspective, literacy is embedded within the social/cultural context in which it occurs, and the individual/learner plays an important role in it. From this standpoint, learning cannot be separated from who a person is- identity; so academically speaking, students' identities as well as their prior knowledge and experiences which mirror their immediate environments become crucial to their learning. Also, parental involvement in their children's education, the activities at school, and the kinds of literacies that are available to children in those immediate environments impact children's identities and their academic performance. The following section presents research regarding the relationship between literacy, family practices and identity and highlights the dissonance between home and school environments that might impede the achievement of immigrant students.

The literacy and familial practices of immigrant families, in most cases, differ from the practices of most mainstream families. Similar to 'genres' and 'Discourses' (Goodman, 1996; Gee, 1990), Garcia (1992) discussed the concept of communicative competence, "the features of language, the interaction patterns necessary to participate in a variety of roles" (p. 57) along with the cultural knowledge. Individuals acquire this competence from the language and culture surrounding them. Garcia also explained that when students, parents, and teachers have all grown up in the same community, they share the same communicative competence. When children come to school with communicative competency similar to those of their teachers, they have a better chance of succeeding. When teachers are unfamiliar with the sociolinguistic styles

of children, as the case with immigrant students being taught by middle-class native speakers, miscommunication and misassessment might occur.

Miscommunication can also be triggered by differences in the ways in which parents and teachers view parents' roles in their children's education. In the context of this discussion, Ada (2001) studied how Latino parents regarded their children's education along with their role in it. Findings of this research indicated that because Latino parents were not in touch with teachers, were not part of the PTA, and did not express clearly plans for their children, teachers assumed that Latino parents did not value their children's education. Never the less, all the interviews and home observations Ada conducted with the Latino families confirmed that Latino parents held their children's education highly. This researcher highlighted assets that Latino families possessed, but which were not explicitly valued at school, such as moral values like respect, generosity, friendships, and solidarity. Such assets characterized the Latino culture and had a particularly strong influence on their relationships, creating a well-knit community and supportive relationships. In addition to these conceptual traits, parents persevered to maintain the heritage language at home by doing things like insisting on speaking the native language with children at home- something that was not appreciated at school. This study confirmed Garcia's (1992) point that miscommunication can cause people to fail to notice many of the traits that students and their families have and which could be built upon by the school.

The way students conduct themselves at school might not be the same way they do at home. Rodriguez (2006) studied the relationship between language and identity in twenty Mexican-American, first-grade, bilingual students in California. He found that schools depicted an identity of students that was totally different from the students' conventional identities at home. Since schools had an educational plan set for students irrespective of their cultural

knowledge and linguistic capabilities, this allowed only one kind of identity to surface- the one that the school expected to see. The findings of this research also reflected that discourses at school positioned students in limiting and negative ways that focused only on the progress students made toward acquiring English, while overlooking their biliteracy skills and cultural activities and without trying to involve parents as cultural resources. One of the significant findings was that parents tended to be more open to adopt school practices whereas schools were rigid, generally resisting changing their practices to conform to their students' home-based practices.

Just like Rodriguez (2006) noted in his study that immigrant parents were willing to be more flexible in the new culture when it came to embracing the practices of schools, Romo and Falbo (1996) found that students tended to submit to the pressure of the subculture at school and adopt behaviors in order to fit in. In their four-year study of one hundred Hispanic families of "at-risk" students, Romo and Falbo discussed how most Latino students acknowledged that the White American culture was the culture at school. Those Latino students did not notice that due to their cultural heritage, they did not fit into a peer group. Despite the fact that they exerted effort to fit in, they were not accepted and some of the parents admitted that schools were biased in favor of the White American culture. In fact, based on their social and economic status, students were categorized by peers into groups and given names like: "preps" who enjoyed wealth, "kickers" who belonged to working class White parents, "new wavers" who wore black and listened to hip-hop music, "jocks" who were members of the varsity teams, and then there were the "Mexican Americans" and the "Latinos"- the last on the school social ladder. Romo and Falbo found that the "Mexican Americans" (who immigrated at a young age) wanted to identify with the "Latinos", which caused a lot of disruptions and behavioral problems with the

“Latinos” (newcomers) who were considered the fifth or sixth groups in the social ladder. Such categorizations reflected an underlying culture that created cultural boundaries which negatively impacted students’ behavior and achievement at school. Romo and Falbo confirmed that for some immigrants, the student culture could exert pressure on students and could have a stronger effect on the children of immigrant families than their home culture.

Just as the culture at school exerts pressure on students, the home culture affects students’ literacy either negatively or positively. Cieslinski (2007) looked at the out-of-school literacy experiences of six Hispanic kindergarteners and examined how these experiences influenced their language development. With both qualitative and quantitative methods, Cieslinski found that the parents involved at school demonstrated to their children that school was important; yet, they did not help their children with homework because they did not know how to connect between the home and school learning. However, older siblings and relatives would pitch in to help children with their school work. Rodriguez (2006) also found that language barriers prevented some parents from being involved in their children’s school life and that impacted the children’s achievement; whereas parents with stronger English skills, who were involved in their children’s schools had a sustained influence on their children learning the expected skills and concepts. The two studies of Cieslinski (2007) and Rodriguez (2006) exhibit the differences that existed in the two worlds of school and home for these families. The studies also show that the closer the parents are to their children’s school environment, the more beneficial it is to their children’s education. Therefore, when looking at factors that impact students’ achievement, the active role that parents have in their children’s school life should also be considered.

In her ethnographic study, Li (2001) looked at practices of a Chinese preschooler in Canada. She presented how the participant's situated literacy reflected her socio-cultural environment and contributed to her learning emphasizing the presence of a community of practice which consisted of her parents, the customers of their restaurant, and the researcher. Her environment surrounded her with functional print (e.g., she learned her letters from soda cans, cigarette packs, and cards). However, that was not the traditional learning valued at schools, where her cultural and social web were not recognized. Li concluded that students such as her participant may be labeled as at-risk children in schools despite the fact that the participant was immersed in oral and print literacy at home.

More research has documented how the home environment that children are immersed in, the distinctive practices of that home, and the unique identities that children form at home affect their literacies. Wallace (2008) examined literacy practices that students engaged in every day at home and school in two multicultural London schools in which students exhibited their identities as immigrants and as learners. Wallace looked at four female elementary students' conversations about literature. The students' Discourses embraced their cultural identities. For example, students had close affiliations with their countries of origin in that they still called them their "home country" and that their parents enforced that their native languages were to be spoken at home. The students' practices also reflected their cultural identities in the choice of the literacy activities they enjoyed (folk stories) which invoked gender roles (boys bearing the financial responsibility), specific academic experiences such as the genre they chose for reading which reflected their past knowledge/experiences, and sports such as football. Wallace affirmed that if schools wished to engage those students, then the students' identities marked a

potentially rich resource that would engage students critically, such as choice in school texts and incorporating the children's diverse personal histories, texts, and practices.

Changes in students' families and schools, as well as new expectations and memorable moments can also impact students' lives, identities, and academic performances. In her longitudinal ethnographic study, Compton-Lilly (2012) tracked eleven families of her students over ten years and explored how students and their parents enacted the issues of literacy, schooling, and identity. Compton-Lilly examined the relationship between identity and literacy. First, she looked at children's textual preferences and found that students' choices of readings were an enactment of their identity and the culture in which they lived. Students were not interested in school literacy, for example, because it was unfamiliar to them, it was serious, it had historical significance, and it did not represent them. In addition, students distanced themselves from the books that the school assigned to them to read. Another finding was that students' choices of reading were "cultural models of the self" (p. 43) in that students' gender and maturity positioned them as readers and influenced their choices of reading at school. This specific study reflected that students' identity, as well as their cultural practices played a role in their literacy practices. The researcher also concluded that the literacy choices students made depicted their cultural, ethnic, and social identities.

Because identity is related to daily lives and experiences and group affiliations which individuals learn from, we bring who we are to the process of learning. Many studies (Choi, 2009; Fayden, 2005; Moll et al., 2009; Zhou and Salili 2008) have looked at the effect of the home environment, which encompasses the culture and identity of students, on literacy with Hispanic, Chinese, and Native Indian students respectively. Moll and colleagues (2005) explored, in an extensive study the cultural practices of the Latino community represented by

their knowledge, artistic artifacts, skills, experiences, productive abilities, and especially social networks. These resources were considered ‘capitals’ that had developed throughout the families’ histories, but they often went undetected at schools at the time when teachers could have built upon them to help students excel. Moll and colleagues found that one type of strong social capital that the Latino families had was their social networks. Those networks connected students with their communities and other adults and thus facilitated the development and exchange of resources. When teachers in that study developed an authentic knowledge of their students, they discovered a wealth of resources in the students’ world outside the context of school that they could draw from to aid the students’ academic achievement. Some of these resources were: a strong fostering philosophy of child rearing that is highly supportive of education and which includes learning English, high expectations for a university-level education, strong values of respect for others, developing a great sense of identity, and finally all Latino houses possessed the same values and funds of knowledge that could be utilized in the classroom.

In a qualitative study of four immigrant Chinese students Choi (2009) looked at how those students constructed their social identity in an after-school literacy club. Choi used multicultural literature to examine how the adolescent students opened up to talk about themselves, describe their experiences, feelings, opinions, and thoughts as immigrant students. Findings in this study revealed that education was an important theme that helped students construct their social identity. Also, some students associated with educated persons because they believed that education was important to achieve independence and wealth. Another student aligned himself with ethnic peers because they were more serious about their education unlike his American peers. For another participant in the study, education meant success and a

spot for identity construction. The study also revealed that participating in clubs at school helped students construct their ethnic and cultural identities because they provided a place for identities to surface, unlike the constraints of curriculum and time in classrooms. Ethnic and cultural identities surfaced with students reflecting their parents' emphasis on the heritage language at home and their determination to teach their children their heritage language as well.

Home literacy factors not only affect children's development of specific cultural literacy habits, but they are also related to intrinsic reading motivation in children. In their study of one-hundred seventy seven children in China, Zhou and Salili's (2008) findings indicated that some practices by parents had a particularly strong effect on the literacy development of children. Practices such as providing books for children at home, modeling reading for children, and reading books to the children played an important role in intrinsic motivation in children. Hence, the emphasis on literacy could start with the home practices and continue at school.

On the other hand, Fayden (2005) researched Native American students in a mainstream school community. Fayden invested her time with the Pueblo Indians to understand their culture, history, and construction of knowledge. She discovered that the rich culture, communal lives, and unique experiences of Pueblo Indians did not match their teachers' expectations in the classroom in skills, practices, and Discourses. Therefore, in order to help students succeed in school, Fayden focused on the oral and social competencies (dramatic play, gesturing, drawing, and art work) that her kindergartner students mastered from their culture as she led them to develop their writing at school. For example, she activated their inherent social skills by encouraging talk among groups, drawing, singing, acting, and collaboration. Such prewriting evolved to writing which included real-life writing tasks through creating a school post office where students wrote letters and sent them out to addressees. Realizing the collective aspect of

their society, and how students shared common-home experiences that bonded them together socially, politically, and religiously, Fayden acknowledged the students' learning styles and set up group discussions in her classroom which evolved to more complex assignments such as writing with a purpose and for an audience. Fayden arrived at the conclusion that, in case of the Pueblo Native American students, the process of becoming literate is a process of negotiation of what students thought at a particular point in time (i.e. what they bring with them) and of what a particular culture told them (i.e. the facts they learn at school). In other words, Fayden thought of literacy as a process of 'transaction' (Goodman, 1998), in which meaning making relates to the published text, but at the same time, it is personal (p.92). The study came as a reflection of the approach of teachers to enhance students' abilities by realizing students' strengths and building on them. For example, Fayden started with students' immediate academic knowledge, which made them progress to write for real-life purposes like they practiced in their real lives. Fayden's main finding was that students were at a disadvantage when they were mainstreamed by the school since this ignored and trivialized their culture and created a mismatch between school and home instead of adapting to the students' culture and using it to advance students.

Despite a growing body of research on Latino, Chinese, African-Americans, and Native-Americans, research is still limited when it comes to the literacy practices of Arabic immigrant families. Callaway (2012) examined the home literacy practices of two preschoolers, a Syrian American and a Libyan American. She found the family literacy practices included multimodal methods in their daily literacy experiences such as a combination of books, digital-recordings, CDs with the alphabet song, and paper-pencil worksheets to match letters. Even though the families assimilated in the American culture through the practices listed above, they

maintained their ethnic identities like their bilingualism and religious literacy practices which emerged in their daily practices.

In a similar study with Arabic participants, Kingsbury (2008) looked at the home literacy practices of Sudanese immigrant families. Sudanese immigrant parents emphasized the tribal language heritage, although many families were multilingual. Parents also stressed English competency, however they encouraged only the males in the family to pursue higher education similar to Li's (2008) findings about Sudanese families. Relatedly, Robertson (2002) highlighted a Pakistani boy's ability to converse in three languages which was overlooked at school. In this study, Robertson highlighted the additional strengths and literacy practices that bilingual children might bring from their community and which are not recognized by the school. In these studies of Arab families, students had a wealth of knowledge similar to that of their Latino, African, Chinese, and Native American peers; and researchers (Callaway, 2012; Fayden, 2005; Kingsbury, 2008; Robertson, 2002) noted that such capital could support students' learning at school were it noticed by educators.

As shown in the research above, the home environments of immigrant families influence the literacy practices of children and shape their identities. The discussed studies have shown the richness in the culture, home practices, and experiences of immigrant families. Research has also shown that all of the features of individuals' literacies incorporated aspects of their identities. Those aspects were culturally embedded. In addition, these studies suggest that in order to help students become higher achievers, educators should incorporate students' experiences, previous knowledge, and specific backgrounds in the process of teaching them and build a bridge between the home and the classroom.

### **Perceptions of Teachers, Parents, and Students**

Several studies (Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2012; Heath, 1983, 1996, 2012; Li, 2008) have investigated the effects of the community, culture, identity, and the literacy practices of families on students' literacy and learning. Those and other studies (Brown, 2011; Fayden, 2012; Moll, 2005) have also highlighted how schools might not recognize non-mainstream literacy practices, which, in turn, might negatively impact students academically. In all of the studies that looked at the specific cultural practices of mainstream and immigrant students, none investigated this topic from the collective point of view of the concerned people: teacher, parents, and students. It is important to investigate the perceptions of these groups about students' unique backgrounds and home literacy practices that make them successful at school and to examine in what sense students project their different identities at school. This section sheds light on studies in the field that sought understanding related to educational issues by asking parents, educators, and students about their perceptions in educational matters.

When teachers have an understanding of the home culture of students, they can develop insight on students' home literacy practices and use this knowledge to the advantage of students. In one study, Baker and colleagues (1996) investigated the perspectives of a low-income and minority parents by asking them to log in a diary their literacy practices for one week. Baker analyzed data collected from the logs about parents' perceptions of the everyday home activities that they practiced with their children and thought were conducive to literacy development. Findings confirmed that children participated in a wide array of print-related literacy events that ranged from storybook reading to knowledge about the world via watching T.V. and narrative competence from discussions around the dinner table. When compared with what middle-income families practiced at home, the kinds of literacies observed at the low-income families

were similar to those at the, in some ways, similar. Some differences in physical capital existed such as the low-income families looked at literacy as a skill to be mastered rather than developed and they had less access to print materials and games for their children. Another difference was that low-income parents tended to adopt a more playful approach to teaching their children. This study showed that parents' perspectives, drawn from the diaries they kept, provided a window for teachers to understand the literacy practices and the assets that were present for students at home.

Similarly, in order to understand the home literacy activities of students, Lazar and Weisberg (1996) asked parents to keep a journal about their children's reading habits at home and the ways in which they viewed their children as readers at school. After reading the journals, teachers broadened their views of students' practices at home since they could see the influence of the family literacy events on students' reading in class. The journals explained how some practices of parents may have indirectly discouraged their children from reading since the parents focused on fluent reading and misinterpreted miscues as non-skilled reading. The study also showed that the journals could be used as a bridge to connect home and school and promote a chance for teachers to build upon students' home practices. For example, to develop a more confident reader, one participant's teacher paired him up with another student to read with in class after the journals revealed that the student read at home with a cousin. In addition, teachers became aware of the students' lives, so they incorporated students' experiences into their lesson plans. Teachers also used parents' feedback to extend their support to children outside class, like offering some reading strategies to help struggling readers and explaining the independent reading level of the children to parents to help them choose appropriate books for their children. The study demonstrated to children authentic function of literacy (real communication between

parents, students, and teachers in writing), and most importantly, it showed how reciprocal communication between home and school could lead to cultural exchange that would help improve children's achievement.

The same absence of understanding of teachers about ethnic minority family literacy practices prompted Makin and McNaught (2001) to investigate families' literacy practices in early childhood services in Australia and to determine which of those matched the teachers' assumptions. The perceptions of eighty staff members and parents revealed that the parties (teachers and parents) had different views. While parents expected a skills-based teaching approach at school, teachers resisted that and were more supportive of a natural approach (e.g., not instruction on phonics but rather a whole language approach). Another differing view concerned the impact of technology: While parents considered T.V. as a valuable literacy tool, teachers believed that it was taking the reading time of children at home. Parents were also concerned about the loss of the children's heritage language, whereas teachers considered languages other than English problematic since maintaining the home-language at school would require a lot of resources. In addition to understanding parents' perspectives about literacy practices, the interviews allowed teachers to understand the interests of the children such as computer games, television programs, and popular cultural figures on TV. Such areas had been ignored or dismissed by teachers at school. The study also gave educators an opportunity to view what each family's background and experiences consisted of and to be mindful of students' different discourses.

It is always helpful to use parents as a lens to look into the unique practices and perceptions of immigrant families. Because teachers are often not familiar with the culturally diverse practices of minority children and how parents do literacy at home, Li (2006) conducted

a case-study of three Chinese immigrant families of second graders in Canada to understand their perceptions, beliefs, and values about their home literacy practices. She found that the home environment influenced whether children were successful or struggled at school. Parents' perceptions toward bilingualism supported children's acquisition of the heritage language by providing adequate resources for children after school to develop the heritage language and depended on school to supplement resources to develop their English language. For example, in the first family, in which parents were born in the United States to an immigrant Chinese family, the only son was involved in a variety of after-school activities including Chinese lessons. However, the child was hesitant to admit that he knew Chinese at school. The second family was first generation; the child did not have the same variety of activities but studied Chinese and math at home with her parents. The third family, the least educated, was the most laid back and did not emphasize English mastery at home as they thought their son had picked it up from TV and that he would learn it as he grew up. That families' activities consisted of visiting the library once a week to borrow educational CDs in English. The son had several encyclopedias that he surfed every night, drew pictures of stories he read, and studied Chinese at an afternoon school. This study reflected how the three families' home practices were different despite the fact that they all shared the same heritage language. Yet, in all the homes, there was an emphasis on learning the heritage language. The study also examined the perceptions of parents about being minority and reflected their attitudes toward their native language and home activities which revealed that all had pride in their culture and heritage. This study showed that the parents' level of education can influence the kind of literacy practices at home, creating differences within microcultures.

In a similar study to Li's, Lao (2004) surveyed 86 parents whose children attended a Chinese bilingual preschool to understand the parents' choice of bilingual education, expectations for their children, and their home environments. The findings indicated that the parents in the study who were fluent in their native language did not read to their children in Chinese at home, did not invest in print-based literacy in Chinese like newspapers and magazines, and did not take advantage of social situations to help their children develop their heritage language, even though they conversed in their native language at home along with the extended family. Those parents relied on the formal tutoring the children were receiving at school without investing personally in that education. Similarly, parents who had limited proficiency in their native language did not use family resources, like grandparents being around and the parents' fluency in Chinese, to advance their children's language like the families who had bilingual skills (the first group). In this study it was clear that the bilingual school that the children attended did not recognize and utilize the family capital available to children at home (people who are skilled in the home language, along with social situations to use the language) to help them learn their heritage language. At the same time, parents lack the understanding of how they could advance their children's becoming bilingual. The study showed that disconnect between school and home concealed the resources present in the home setting which resulted in a disadvantage in the children's education.

Bilingual education was a common theme in most studies that looked at the perceptions of immigrant families. Riches and Curdt-Christiansen (2010) conducted a comparative study that examined and compared the beliefs and perspectives of immigrant Chinese parents and Anglophone parents regarding the development of bilingual and biliteracy of their children and how the parents provided opportunities to facilitate the development of their children's literacy

outside of school. The researchers interviewed ten Chinese immigrant families and thirteen Anglophone families and found that the Chinese immigrant parents had maintained their traditions, values, and activities in Canada- their new country. Parents emphasized attaining good grades, valued education, and had high expectations for their children which included college plans because they thought of college as a matter of survival in the new country. The Anglophone parents had similar expectations for their children regarding education, but they were more secure about it since it was not a reason for their emigration and these things had always been available and abundant. Another finding was that the Chinese parents viewed education as a parental duty and a responsibility, whereas the Anglophone parents viewed learning as their children's responsibility, and they believed that their children would benefit from learning languages, but did not make it a must. Both groups of parents believed learning a new language while maintaining their first/home language would extend beyond school success to develop their children's senses of belonging and identity. Nevertheless, Chinese immigrant parents believed that maintaining the home language meant preserving the ethnic and sociocultural identity of children. Both parents considered multilingualism as a means of providing resources for children, and were especially focused on English, as it is a global language today. The great belief of parents in multilingualism influenced parents to invest and become involved by providing many resources for their children to develop their languages like visiting the library, reading books, assisting with homework, tutoring, and extracurricular activities. Even though the ways Chinese immigrant families practiced literacy at home were similar to Anglophone families, they did not participate in their children's mainstream schools' activities due to the language barrier and due to thinking there was not a need to initiate a contact with the school.

When interviewing parents about their beliefs about literacy, research has revealed that sometimes parents' perceptions about education and learning were in congruence with teachers' and at other points they differed. For example, upon looking at perceptions of immigrant parents regarding essential learning activities of their children, Hayden (1997) found that parents' beliefs contradicted teachers' in that they considered accuracy and precision were important at an early age for children to learn, while teachers believed that children learned using the natural approach and that mistakes in reading were considered miscues that indicated emerging literacy skills. In addition, parents and teachers' beliefs were contrary to each other regarding the role of the teacher. Parents considered teachers' job to be to impart information to students, who should listen and remember while teachers regarded their role as facilitators, who believed that students construct knowledge through participating actively in it. Parents also had different views about assessments and grading in that parents expected their children to be assessed daily and were disappointed when they did not receive grades frequently and for every reading assignment. In addition, parents' disappointment regarding the scarcity of homework assigned by school showed different attitude from schools' conceptions that homework is assigned when necessary and not on everyday basis, like parents expected. The study confirmed that immigrant parents who were not familiar with the educational system in the new country had views about teaching and learning consistent with their cultural beliefs and their own schooling experiences, but inconsistent with mainstream, American education and teachers.

On the other hand, and in a year-long ethnography, Portier and Perterson (2013) examined the perspectives and observations of nineteen mainstream parents of middle school students about using multimodal assignments like wikis and blogs. The purpose of the study was to break out from the traditional view of homework and communications and to establish

a conversation with parents that would inform educators with parents' input and recommendations. The findings indicated that parents enthusiastically supported online homework and that students were more motivated to do the work. The project enhanced parent-child collaboration and parents were aware of how their children's day at school went. For example, online assignments and wikis enhanced the homework process since parents were aware what the homework was every day, feedback from teachers was faster, students were more organized and never lost materials, and instruction was clearly available on the web when needed. The most important finding was that the project was able to bring many of the online tools from the students' social and home lives into the academic arena. For example, students were eager to finish the online-homework in order to collect points to play the game connected to the experience. The study revealed the positive and supportive opinions of parents regarding online homework and how the project allowed parents to supervise students as the students monitored their own learning. Unlike Hayden's (1997) findings about the contradiction between parents and teachers' perceptions, this study came as a perfect example of how the collaboration among parents, teachers, and students could benefit students' academic achievement. Students' motivation increased and they moved from working collaboratively first into applying individual-technological problem-solving tasks which encompassed writing and construction. The study also reflected how students' learning at school can be extended from school into the home in meaningful ways when both parties develop an understanding about the practices of the other. Although this study was not conducted with English language learners, the findings are relevant because they reflect how children can prosper when there is a continuum between school and home and when each build on the other.

In all of the above studies, parents' perceptions were critical in providing a third dimension on the education of children. Interestingly, studies that investigate the perceptions of students and ask them to be reflective about the literacy practices that impact their academic achievement are not abundant in literature in the field. In one study, Katzir and colleagues (2008) looked into the influence of the home literacy experiences on reading ability in children from the students' perspectives. The researchers examined the relationship between child and family literacy practices and their relation to children's reading self-concept. They surveyed the perceptions of fourth-grade urban students about their reading self-concept and their family literacy practices. The authors found that along with the home environment, psychosocial factors of the children such as the difficulty of the reading task and the motivation of children to read contributed to understanding reading comprehension of children. This study was the first to look at psychosocial factors in children who neither struggle academically nor are labeled as ELs. The significance of the study was that it interviewed fourth-grade children outside the school setting and the results revealed that individual and contextual factors influenced the development of reading and writing in these children. The study also showed the influence of the students' self-perceptions and the child and the influence of the family literacy practices on reading improvement. This study ties in to this research in that the study eliminated variables such as language limitations and learning difficulties and looked at mainstream students to determine the real reasons behind developing literacy by looking at perceptions of students to gain this knowledge. Just like ELs' development of identities impact their literacies, the same is true when it comes to main stream students.

In a similar study that considered students' perceptions, Marion (2009) interviewed 37 mainstream students in an adult literacy program in Canada about their insights regarding their

own schooling experiences and reasons for dropping out of school. Even though students were disappointed by their experience at school, their views reflected a positive attitude that they expressed in nostalgic talk about it. Findings of the study indicated that the school did not provide counseling that helped students with their daily problems- the causes for their quitting school. Skipping, lack of flexibility, personal problems, course content and instructional practices, pace of the classroom, and boring or irrelevant materials were among the reasons why the students quit high school. Students affirmed that, in contrast, the adult programs were individualized, criterion based, and self-paced, and that was why they were more successful there. The students' perceptions enlightened the researchers about teachers' roles in terms of motivating students and discouraging or encouraging some. The third insight was about peers at school: Some students commented that they felt that they were incompetent and incongruent to their peers, and being bullied. Despite the fact that this study did not directly measure the perceptions of students in high school, it provided a great insight into the students' recollections of their schooling experiences, which yielded some realistic perspectives from their point of view and some considerations on the side of educators. This is relevant to the study because it reflects that when teachers get to know students individually rather than teach collectively- the subject matter and not the students- students prosper in school.

From another standpoint, Fisher and Frey (2008) compared the perceptions of teachers and students about literacy strategies in an "at-risk" high school. In order to improve test scores, the school had newly implemented learning strategies as an instructional approach rather a single instructional event. Data from surveys and interviews of teachers and students provided valuable input. First, teachers had specific perceptions about the most effective literacy strategies. Different departments rated the strategies differently as well as categorized them

positively or negatively depending on practicality of the strategy, teachers' familiarity with it, and ease of use in class. For example, the science department gave high rank to graphic organizers; social studies ranked anticipatory guides as most useful; and the English department ranked vocabulary strategies as the most useful. This reflected that teachers' perceptions about what benefited students most were dissimilar. On the other hand, interviews with students exposed that some students perceived that they had used few strategies out of compliance in class rather than as a learning tool. For example, students disliked "taking notes" and "writing to learn" and did not feel they helped them learn better, but practiced them in class because the teachers instructed them to do so. The differences in how students and teachers ranked the strategies revealed how each side valued the effectiveness, usefulness, and role of the strategy. In addition, students' responses showed that they were able to recognize which strategies worked in class and which were less effective, yet they had to comply with teachers' instructions to use all strategies as instructed. This study revealed the differences between the knowledge of educators and the learning of students, and it reflected that sometimes students had remarkable insight on what worked and did not work in the classroom.

### **Summary**

In the extensive research discussed in this chapter, there was an emphasis on the influence of the home literacy practices, identity, and culture on students' achievement at school. The three major ethnographic studies of Compton-Lilly (2003, 2012), Heath (1998, 2012), and Li (2008), substantiated how identity stood among the cultural and social factors that impacted immigrant families and their children. The research also identified certain practices that were valuable and that schools appreciated most and at the same time how schools overlooked some other cultural assets that students possessed. The literature review revealed

that while studies are abundant at the preschool and elementary level, and for a variety of cultural groups, research remains narrow when it comes to investigating the intersection of culture and identity and the impact of home practices on the literacy of immigrant Arabic students at the high school level. This is important because high school is a critical stage in students' lives. Hence it is important to examine the perceptions of Arabic immigrant families, their children, and teachers about their daily lives and unique experiences in order to present information about the backgrounds and living experiences of those families.

It is important to inspect the opinions of teachers, students, and parents since all three are the stake holders in the educational enterprise and crucial players in linking home and school experiences and Discourse. The different perspectives of parents, teachers, and students represent the eye glasses that would allow us to understand the different components of the educational realm and its real needs. As it has been shown in the above-discussed research, students' achievement at school is influenced by their identities and home practices which dictate how students conducted themselves in and out of school. Inspecting the perceptions of parents, teachers, and students regarding students' literacy practices will help recognize the cultural practices specific to those groups. Examining how these perspectives might overlap or contrast with each other would inform the field about specific literacy practices of particular groups, such as Arabic immigrant families, and inform educators about how to best meet the needs of immigrant students. The differences in perceptions among teachers, students, and parents may uncover the strengths among immigrant families that go unrecognized at school and help inform the field about Arabic ELL population.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the different perspectives of parents, students, and teachers on the literacy practices in the home environments of Arab immigrant students and how they reveal characteristics of the students' cultural, social, and positional identities. Situated within the sociocultural theory of learning, this study allowed me to look at the social, cultural, and identity contexts and how they were embedded in the practices of Arab immigrant families. This chapter introduces the methodology that was employed and explains the specific data collection procedures that were used in the study. In particular, I describe the selection of participants, interview and observations processes, and data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of several steps that I used in order to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

The main research questions for the study were:

1. What are four Arab immigrant high school students' perceptions about their backgrounds and home literacy practices?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about the students' backgrounds and home literacy practices?
3. What are Arab immigrant parents' perceptions about their home environments and home literacy practices?

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, analyzing the self-reported perceptions of the participants to highlight the "funds of knowledge" and sources of capital available in the homes of immigrant families. The study also examined the extent to which these unique literacy practices were embedded in the characteristics of the distinctive environments

and reflected aspects of the students' cultural, social, and positional identities. Stake (1995) discusses several characteristics of qualitative research: first: it is holistic in that it is contextualized and case oriented. For example, it considers the wide sweep of context such as temporal, special, historic, cultural, personal, and social factors (p. 43). Second, it is field oriented, naturalistic, and noninterventionistic; which means that the researcher observes the ordinary without interfering and interprets the observations in ways that inform the research questions. The participants expressed their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes through interviews, and the researcher triangulated this information through observations in students' home environments. In addition, because the purpose of this study was to shed light on the cultural capital and unique literacy practices of particular Arab immigrant students, as opposed to trying to create generalized knowledge or intervene, qualitative design was most appropriate.

### **Research Design**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) list specific reasons for engaging in qualitative research one of which is attempting to “understand the meaning or nature of experience of persons... [Qualitative research] lends itself to getting out into the field and finding out what people are doing and thinking” (p.11). Similarly, Weiss (1994) provides several reasons for selecting a qualitative interview research methodology, among which are: seeking the fullest, detailed descriptions, integrating multiple perspectives; and bridging intersubjectivities; for example, when a researcher seeks to explain a situation as an insider (p. 10). Likewise, interviewing different concerned people widened the scope of and contextualized information I obtained in this research. The observations helped provide detailed descriptions of the environments of where students engaged in literacy outside the school; since this research was qualitative in nature, it allowed me to seek answers to the above questions and begin to understand the values,

beliefs and attitudes of the participants by looking at the practices from the inside. In other words, conducting a qualitative research study allowed me to obtain intricate details about the home literacy practices of the Arabic immigrant students and their families, which could not be obtained by other research methods.

There are three major components to qualitative research: data, procedures, and the written or verbal reports (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 12). In this research, I collected data from interviews and observations. Then I used open coding procedures to look at categories to build concepts as I read through the data, and finally, produced the written report in terms of findings of the research triangulating data from both sources.

Maxwell (2005) explains that in qualitative research “participants are not treated as a sample from some larger population of teachers to whom the study is intended to generalize, but as a case of group of people who are studied in a particular context” (p. 71). Case study research, a sub-category of qualitative research, entails an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context” (Yin, 2003, p. 16). Stake (1995) differentiates among three kinds of case studies: intrinsic, characterized by the motif to learn about a particular case; instrumental, characterized by a need for general understanding; and collective case studies, characterized by selecting several institutions or individuals and maintaining coordination between them (p.8). This research could be considered a collective case study since it investigated the culturally-specific literacy practices of four students belonging to the same ethnic minority and school population and looked for sources of capital in their home literacy habits. Gaining insight into how teachers, parents, and students perceived their educational practices and why they perceived them as they did required an examination of their viewpoints on educational practices and what impacted their educational attainment. This

was achieved through conducting interviews with various participants in the research. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain that qualitative interviews “make a complex reality understandable to a reader without oversimplifying it” (p.60). In the case of this study, this involved close examination of the participants’ responses/words to understand the different patterns in meaning which were apparent through the data.

### **The Role of Researcher**

Creswell (2005) acknowledges how the researcher’s practices, personal experiences, and beliefs affect every aspect of the research, whether in collecting data, analyzing them, or interpreting them. My dominant Arabic background qualified me to conduct this research and provided a specific lens to understand and investigate the general culture, microculture, and subculture of the immigrant students. As a high school teacher, I also had the experience, resources, and connections with students, their families, and teachers to make the study run smoothly. This professional experience is important to qualitative research. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), it enables a researcher to access an area faster than an inexperienced one since it saves the researcher time needed to become familiar with the environment.

The cross-cultural background that I had provided me with a unique standpoint and understanding of both cultures: American schooling and Arabic home life. I am a female Arabic, born and educated in Lebanon where I earned my Bachelor’s Degree and taught for several years before I immigrated to the United States and pursued my graduate degrees. I have been teaching English as a second language at a public high school for several years. I can converse in Arabic within my community and at the same time speak English fluently in my professional setting. My experiences in both cultures, both in the community and in schools, made me realize the differences and how an educator can build on the unique cultural

knowledge of students to help them become more successful in their new environment. Schensul and colleagues (1999) indicate the importance of the interviewer's knowledge of the local culture in order to maintain etiquette and politeness during the conversation. My familiarity and experience of crossing the boundaries between two cultures made me an appropriate candidate to conduct such a study that required deep understanding of sensitive cultural issues and the unique literacy practices of immigrant families, but also the Discourses of schooling in the U.S.

Li (2000) states that "the cultural background of researchers is also important as it affects how they view the relationship between literacy and identity" (p.10). Unlike researchers from the dominant culture who investigate minority groups, I had the advantage of being an insider and of conducting this research with an Eastern perspective, just as Li's Asian background enabled her to investigate immigrant Asian families by giving her the privilege of sharing similar knowledge, beliefs, and customs. Similarly, my position was that of an insider and a person who had unlocked the door to both environments: school and home.

Similar to Li, Gonzalez and colleagues (2005) and Heath (1983) posit that the beliefs, values, and culture of immigrant families define their literacy practices which in turn impact their identities since literacy is part of who a person is, which causes their cultural, social, and positional identities to form. Therefore in this research, I looked at the literacy practices of Arab immigrant families using a cultural lens framed by sociocultural theory which emphasizes that learning occurs within a sociocultural environment. Our common culture allowed me to access the immigrant families' homes to learn about their literacy beliefs, lives, and practices. In addition, my experiences as a teacher in the Arabic world as well as the United States informed my study in a way that facilitated viewing and interpreting immigrant practices.

### **Data Sources and Data Collection Processes**

**Participants.** The participants in this qualitative study were immigrant students, students who have been in the United States for over one year, but less than five years, attending a public high school in a mid-western state, in a region that has a large concentration of Arabic-speaking persons. In addition, the students' parents and teachers were participants in the study.

In order to recruit participants that best fit the context of my study, I used purposeful selection. This method gave me the chance to select "information-rich cases for study in depth", which according to Patton (1990), "are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). In other words, I did "select ...participant[s] according to the needs of the study" (Morse, 1991, p. 129). In choosing my sample then, I relied on my prior knowledge (drawn from the school in which I teach and they attend) and my deep understanding of the Arabic culture that helped me determine the best fit to participate in the study. For example, since I previously had the four participants in my class, I knew the parents of the four participants and I knew their nationalities as well.

At the suburban high school in which this study was situated- Sunshine High School (pseudonym), students of immigrant families are flagged as English learners through a process of identification which includes a formal assessment of their English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students who are not deemed proficient in English are enrolled in an English-as-a-second-language program with their levels of English proficiency indicated in the student information system of the school. Students receive various levels of support during the day depending on their needs. Some are enrolled in self-contained ESL classes with focus on the development of their English language through content; others receive push-in services through mainstream classes by a certified ESL teacher or paraprofessional. At the time

of the study, around 15% of Sunshine High School's population was identified as ELs. Arab ELs in the program came from different countries, such as Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, and Palestine.

With the help of the ESL team, I generated a list of all ELs that were active during the 2014-2015 school year for possible inclusion in the study. Those constituted the potential research participants. Then, I eliminated all the students who were not from Arabic origin. After that, I eliminated all the students that were inactive, also eligible for special education services, were in one of the classes that I taught, or did not meet the criterion of being in the United States for over a year and less than 5 years.

The criterion of selecting the student participants and their parents based on the time period participants have been in the United States served two aims. First, students who have been in the United States for a year or less would not have had sufficient time to adjust and; therefore, are still using practices that purely represent their country of origin's conventional literacy practices. In addition, they have not had time yet to acquaint with the resources in their community, and they have not had enough time to discover the resources in their community. Second, students who have been in the United States for over 5 years might have been assimilated to a great extent in the American culture and therefore their practices might not reflect their distinctive Arabic culture and identities. Therefore, my intention was to focus on students and parents who have been in the United States for over a year but less than five years.

To avoid looking into students' personal files and accessing their records, I asked counselors and teachers to identify among the names of children who met the residency length requirements, those who were doing well in school according to the school norms of being successful. These were students who had GPAs that were 3.5 or higher, good attendance history

(90% attendance rate or higher), and usually submit homework on time. Similarly, I asked the counselors and teachers to identify those who were not doing well; for example students who had a GPA between 0.5 and 3.0, have 70% attendance or lower, might have had discipline issues, were inconsistent with their effort, and did not submit homework on time. Such criteria produced two lists: successful and unsuccessful students according to school measurement. The reason for soliciting students from both student profiles was to look at a mix of students in terms of being able to look at the influence of culture and family on what is going on academically for students.

The original list consisted of eighteen struggling students and 12 successful students. I sent an informational letter home with each of these students that introduced me, explained the study, and asked parents to provide a phone number in order to initiate contact with them were they to agree to participate in the study. From the potential students and parents, 13 of the struggling students and 9 of the successful students returned the signed letter.

From the above-described lists, I selected two successful students and two struggling students. In choosing my sample, I used my own prior knowledge of the students as well as their backgrounds and families since all four of them had classes with me in previous years which helped me determine the best fit for the study. In addition, in choosing my sample, I used my professional judgment that those participants would provide the research with in-depth information about the specific home literacy practices and different identities of Arab immigrant students based on the interaction I had with them in the classroom. Then, for each student, I selected two teachers that the student had for one or more classes to interview. The primary reason for selecting two teachers for every student was my belief that two teachers would clearly express two opinions about what they thought and observed about the student;

this established more accurate data about the student and from two different perspectives. Since I was interested in literacy, I interviewed one Language Arts teacher for each student, and one content area teacher (e.g. history, biology, or social studies teacher). I contacted teachers in person, several weeks before the interview date, and provided them with the consent form in advance which explained to them the study and informed them about the participant I was interested in knowing about.

As mentioned earlier, I relied on purposeful selection to choose the final four participants: Hassan, Manal, Eman, and Ahmad (pseudonyms). Here is a brief description of the four participants:

### **Hassan**

Hassan has been in the ESL program for 2 years. Hassan immigrated to the United States from Lebanon 2 years ago. Currently, he lives with his mom and step-dad along with his step-sister and step-brothers. After his parents' divorce (several years ago), he was raised by his grandmother who followed up with him at school until he moved to the United States to stay with his mother. Hassan was a low-achieving student who had the most negative experiences at school and he had difficulty adjusting to his new environment and culture at first. All adult members of his family have college degrees.

### **Manal**

Manal, one of the two high-achieving students, is originally from Yemen. She lived with her grandparents in the rural part of Yemen for part of her life while her father was attaining his education in the United States. She moved to the United States along with her 6 siblings. They live all together with their extended family of cousins and their spouses and children in one big mansion. Manal has been in the ESL program for 2 years now, but she has shown fast

progress. Even though she is very shy and quiet, all her teachers describe her as a hard-working, determined student and state that she has positive influence on her peers. Unlike her dad, who has a medical degree, her mom did not finish her education, but Manal always refers to her dad as her role model and her motivator. Manal wear the traditional Yemini garment- “abaya”- and she wears a head scarf.

### **Eman**

Eman, another high-achieving student, immigrated to the United States from Lebanon 2 years ago. In her previous school, she learned French in addition to Arabic, so her English was very limited, yet she has shown great progress in English acquisition. She has an outgoing personality and works hard. In this study, Eman was the only student among the participants that joined an extracurricular activity at school. She does not hesitate to ask for help when needed. Her teachers acknowledge her efforts and recognize her progress. Both of her parents have college degrees.

### **Ahmad**

Ahmad, the second low-achieving student, has an Iraqi nationality from his parents who moved to Kuwait where he was born and raised. Ahmad spent one year in Boston before he moved to Michigan. He is the fifth of seven siblings. He is working to earn a high school diploma, though none of his older siblings finished high school. Neither mom nor dad has a high school diploma. His parents and teachers describe him as a quiet, reserved student who works hard.

In addition to the four student participants, I interviewed two adults in the family. In each case it was the parents of the students except for Hassan who was raised by his grandmother, who I interviewed along with his mother.

**Data sources.** This research was based on qualitative inquiry methods because the nature of the questions and the topic explored in this research entailed qualitative investigation. In order to present a panoramic view of the perceptions of teachers, students and parents, about the home literacy practices of immigrant students, I collected information directly from the participants which revealed ideas that would be hard to identify in data collected by quantitative methods, which often limit the ways in which participants can respond and introduce the preconceived ideas of the researcher. My aim in this research was to look through different perspectives to determine the home literacy practices of immigrant children and what mattered most when it came to literacy. I also wanted to uncover practices that might have gone unnoticed by the school. Therefore, it was important to observe the home literacy practices and ask questions of parents, students, and teachers to identify the common links and be informed by the differences. Each of the methods that I used to collect data for this study is described below.

***In-depth, semi-structured interviews.*** I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with all participants. Weiss (1994) explains that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to be part of the research, and this makes the research more dynamic. In addition, Schensul and colleagues (1999) explain that in-depth interviews, of the sort to be used in this study, facilitate exploring a topic in detail in order to develop a deep understanding of this topic. Schensul and colleagues advise the interviewer to abide by the following five guidelines: first, focus on the relationship between the topic and questions asked; second, keep the interviewee focused on topic; third, follow up with the logical connections that the interviewee is making with the topic; fourth, monitor the sequence of conversation to ask for elaboration when needed; and finally, use probes (p.122). Patton distinguishes among detail-oriented, elaboration, and clarification probes, each of which is important to include. Patton (2002) explains that detail-oriented probes

help generate information in natural conversations in order to understand and satiate our curiosity; for example when the interviewer follows up with a question to obtain and clarify information. Elaboration-probes are gestures like “um-huh”, nodding, and/or being more attentive during an interview with the intent to know more by asking the interviewee to talk more about the topic. Finally, clarification probes ask the interviewee for interpretation when the concepts are vague. Schensul and colleagues add additional probes to Patton’s list, including asking for an opinion, repeating what a person has said in a questioning way, and asking for clarification or internal difference (not obvious to an outside person such as the interviewer) in what the person has said. Therefore, as a researcher, and in order to learn about my participants’ perspectives, I asked my participants questions, listened carefully, and was a keen observer. I used each type of these probes to encourage participants to provide information; however, I did not give suggestions or comments so that the responses were natural and authentic which helped to minimize response bias.

The interviews consisted of some open-ended questions drawn from the questions that the research attempted to investigate along with the formative theoretical model I presented (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). According to Schensul and colleagues (1999), an open-ended question “leaves the response open to the discretion of the interviewee and is not bounded by alternatives provided by the interviewer or constraints on length of the response” (p.121). Berg (2007) argues that the advantages of open-ended questions are that they do not limit the participants with specific choices and they give participants the opportunity to express their general views and opinions. In addition, open-ended questions allowed me, as a researcher, to be in control of the flow of the interview and topics.

The questions for the interviews were drawn from the frameworks and literature in the field. For instance, Gonzalez and colleagues (2005) discuss that social networks are one fund of knowledge because social networks connect people with their social environments and other households and they facilitate the development and exchange of resources (p.73). This information prompted questions about the importance of social networks in the life of students. For example, parents and students were asked specific questions about their relationships with their extended families and about the influence that parents as well as their extended family members had in their lives. Teachers also were asked questions that revealed how students displayed their social identities in class.

Several ethnographies (Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2012; Heath, 1983, 1996, 2012; Li, 2008) along with other research (Brown, 2011; Fayden, 2012; Moll, 2005) discussed in the literature review pointed out the effects of the community, culture, and identity of the home literacy practices on students. These studies prompted questions related to the abilities of students and the impact of the community, traditions, and culture on students, as well as after school activities and daily routines. The interview protocol for this study was semi-structured. It included the basic questions I asked; however, I also asked other questions that were related and followed up with what my participants narrated in their initial responses to the questions, which helped obtain further clarification and expand on what they are saying.

The following table provides sample questions for the purpose of illustrating that there were parallel questions for different participant groups which served to triangulate the data and helped me make comparisons across data (For a complete list of the questions see appendix A, B, C, D, and E):

Table 3.0

## Sample Interview Questions

Questions to Student	Questions to Teacher	Questions to Parent
In your opinion, what are things (people, classes, activities, rules...) that contribute to doing well at school? What makes students not do well?	What do you think are factors that contribute to students doing well in school? What are factors that limit students from doing well?	Tell me about your child's performance at school. What do you think are things that contribute to doing well in school? What makes them not do well?
Tell me about any other family members that you feel provide you support for your learning at school. How do they provide that support? (Or what is their role in your life?)	What kind of school support do you see the student's family provide him/her with?	Tell me about the role of the extended family in your child's life. How does this impact your child's academic achievement?

The main questions of the interviews were associated with a set of probes and more focused questions which I used to encourage participants to elaborate when needed. Rubin and Rubin (2012) identified key elements in effective interview questions such as details, depth, vividness, nuance, and richness (p.102-106). Reflective of this criteria, I asked questions that elicited details to clarify the fine points when the theme was buried in the details as Rubin and Rubin described. For example, after asking the family member: "What kind of literacy activities do you conduct at home with your children?", I followed up with, "Do you watch TV together? What do you see? How often?", and "Do you talk about books? Exchange news? What kind: political or social? Does your child see you reading? Are you subscribed to any magazines? Newspapers? How do you know about what's happening in town? Do you make library visits?" These follow-up questions elicited nuanced responses from the participants.

The questions for the interviews did not focus only on "what" and "how", but more importantly on "why", since they looked in depth at the home literacy practices by going beyond

the first superficial answer (Ruben and Ruben, p.103). For example, after asking the student participant about his/her favorite teacher, I followed up my question with, “Why [do you feel that way]?” and, “Tell me about a time you felt appreciated by a teacher? What happened, and how did you feel?” Such questions triggered an extended response from the participant and made him/her relay an experience.

Moreover, since the questions probed for detail, they presented a vivid picture that was realistic and the descriptions were rich enough that they allowed who were not there to visualize the content. In addition to depth, details, and vividness, Rubin and Rubin recommend that interview questions should provide nuanced answers which means that the interviewer should ask for precise descriptions to invite more complex replies. For this reason, I tried to avoid including yes-or-no and either-or questions in my interview, and I also have backed up the original questions with a series of follow-up questions to seek a more nuanced understanding. For example, when I asked the student participant about how other classmates viewed him/her at school, I followed up with questions like, “Why? Do they respect you? Do they listen to what you say? Invite you to go out with them?” Such back up questions prompted the participant to produce and narrate more detailed information and give specific examples.

Finally, Rubin and Rubin state that questions should be rich enough to produce themes and for that reason, the interviews included questions that elicited extended descriptions and narratives from teachers, students, and parents (p.106). For example, the questions were comprehensive enough to include various aspects of literacy in the lives of participants, whether they were aware that these were literacy practices that they were doing, or not. This helped intensify the themes in the study.

The interviews were conducted in the following order: student, family member 1, family member 2, Language Arts teacher, content area teacher, and then student, again. I followed the same order with all four participants. Because interviews were conducted towards the beginning of the school year (11 weeks in the school year), I intentionally interviewed teachers near the end of the sequence which allowed them some time to get to know the students. In addition, it was important to talk to two members of the students' families to obtain more thorough information in response to the questions. With two interviews, from each type of adult participant for each child, data from the interview of the first in each pair (i.e., the first parent, the literacy teacher) interview was complemented by data in the second interview. Two interviews were also helpful to triangulate data. It was also fundamental to talk to both teacher participants after I have talked to the student once and after I have interviewed both parents in order to expand the data and seek more information. Since the teachers are not part of the home environment of students, their perspectives provided a view of literacy from a different angle, how it was manifested in class. Interviewing participants in this sequence created a stream of data that built on each other and made it clearer to analyze. Since parents and students shared the same environment, information was consistent and flowed to build on each other. Teachers shared a different sphere with students than students with parents. So seeking data in the order described above was smoother to examine. Lastly, it was important to interview the student at the beginning and then at the end to allow me to ask any additional questions that the first interview raised as well as to address themes raised in the other interviews.

I interviewed students after school. I conducted the interviews with family members, each separately, during a home visit upon previous arrangement over the phone. I interviewed teachers in a place that was convenient to teachers and where no one else was present, in order

to protect the teachers' identities. Each participant was interviewed separately and in a private area where only the interviewer and the interviewee were present, and interviews lasted 25 to 45 minutes.

**Observations.** In addition to interviews, I observed students in their home environments. For each participant, I conducted two sixty-minute-long observations: one on a weekday, and another on a weekend. The purpose of visiting the home during the week was to observe the daily after-school literacy routine of participants; whereas the weekends let me note more of the cultural, social realm of activities that the participants were involved in.

I conducted observations right after conducting the first interview with the student and other adults in the family. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain that participant observations involve "recording what is seen or heard for a later more formal analysis of patterns of actions and behaviors" (p.26). During observations I took notes and wrote reflective remarks about the participant and home environment. These field notes were another source of data which included additional information about the participants and their environments as described by Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte (1999): I noted behaviors of participants and recorded them by describing the behavior without attributing meaning to them in my field notes until I discovered what they mean to students and parents by checking with the members afterwards. Second, I described participants including details of appearance, clothing, shoes, items carried by the person, and indicators of status. Finally, I described the physical state of the environment as I saw it- as if in a snapshot picture, for example, the arrangement of the participant's house, the participant's bedroom, the place where the participant did his/her homework, availability of print materials, and so on.

The field notes were additional scientific record for future reference for data analysis. Goodman (1996) stated that literacy in the classroom is an extension of the literacy that started at home (p. 119). From this point of view, I noted any observations of the literacy environment at students' homes in terms of the presence or absence of literacy in the surroundings that could have impacted the students' development of literacy. Goodman also states that school is not the only designated place for literacy to take place. Literacy involves a "community of learners with opportunities to use language" (p.125). Therefore, the real purpose of visiting students and parents at their homes was to try to identify whether and what types of authentic, meaningful, and functional opportunities were available for students to 'do' literacy outside the school. Similarly, in looking for funds of knowledge, Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) state that while visiting households, the researchers observe "the neighborhood, the surrounding area, and the external markers of what identifies this neighborhood" (p.9). They also look for material clues as they note the gardens, garages, and the presence of ornaments in the houses. All of these support the presence of capital in the homes of students. That was the rationale behind visiting parents and students at their homes and talking to them at that setting. Looking at the living spaces of students and paying attention to details informed this study of the kinds of capital present in the household life.

### **Data Analysis**

"Data analysis is systematic search for meaning that often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding" (Hatch, 2002, p.148). LeCompete and Schensul (2010) also establish that analyzing data is a recursive process that involves "continually raising questions in the field, further and further modifying and clarifying ideas about what has been discovered" (p.197). I used this concept to

look at my data immediately, right after collecting them and going back to the information I collected to verify and confirm it.

After conducting each interview, I transcribed it right away. During the interviews, if the parents respond in Arabic, I translated their responses into English and asked a bilingual colleague to check the accuracy of translations. I did this because I believed that important information was in the data, and by “systematically asking the right questions of the data, that information can be revealed” (Hatch, 2002, p.148). Similarly, after each observation, I created a detailed account of the notes taken during the home visit. Observations provided an account of participants as they went about their normal lives. As a researcher, I did not interfere with their routines as I conducted the observations; therefore, I sat in a peripheral corner where I can draw the least attention to myself.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe data analysis as an interplay between researchers and data. They say it is “both science and art” (p.13). With that Strauss and Corbin mean that researchers should strive for accuracy and stick to data secure the scientific aspect of data analysis; while maintaining creativity in questioning, and making sense of raw data ensures the artistic aspect of data analysis.

I started analyzing data right after the first interview. Looking at data for the first time resembled what LeCompete and Schensul (2010) describe as looking at an unassembled jigsaw puzzle. There is not one single approach to assembling the parts; each person approaches this task differently. LeCompete and Schensul also indicate that while dealing with data, a researcher should “engage in a systematic cognitive/process involving comparing, contrasting, looking for linkages, similarities, differences, and finding sequences, co-occurrences and absences” (p. 199). Listening to the participants through the interviews, along with transcribing

them made me more familiar with the data. After that, I read the transcribed data several times and made meaning out of it. So, I examined data from each interview by itself and then looked across data from all interviews for a particular participant. Similarly, I examined data from each observation by itself, and then across both observations for each participant. Finally, I looked across data from interviews and observations together. This allowed me to discover domains following the procedures of domain analysis described by Spradley (1979) such as looking at semantic relationships, preparing a domain analysis worksheet, selecting statements, finding cover terms, formulating a structural question for each domain and finally making a list of hypothesized domains (p.118). The domains helped me arrive at themes in my data, by creating thematic labels and assigning data into categories based on similarity in characteristics to create domains. Finally, I compared my themes to the literature and similar studies to determine likeness.

### **Trustworthiness**

In order to enhance the worth of this research, I followed the strategies recommended by Guba (1981) such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks-during and after the study, developing thick description of the context, and transferability.

First, to have triangulation, Guba (1981) states that data must come from “a variety of perspectives, using a variety of methods, and drawing upon a variety of resources” (p. 14). In addition, the researcher must provide documentation for every claim from at least two sources. For this reason, I sought multiple perspectives on the same topics from different participants by interviewing students, parents, and teachers and in order to achieve triangulation. Another way that I ensured triangulation in my study was to use multiple sources of data such as interviews and in-home observations of literacy practices.

Second, to achieve trustworthiness, I did member checking (Guba,1991) by asking a colleague who was familiar with immigrant students to look at the set of questions for each interview and provide me with feedback on the clarity and sequence of the questions.

Third, Guba writes about the importance of “thick descriptions” since they allow comparison of the context to other contexts. Thick descriptions means providing extensive details of the experiences of participants while paying attention to the context of those experiences. To do this, I presented a description of the home environment of the students as well as the subjects’ behaviors and appearances which gave a panoramic picture and a deep, thick sense of the atmosphere at home. In addition, I reverted to using direct quotes from interviews with participants to enrich the descriptions.

Peer debriefing, is another way to improve the validity and reliability of the data in which inquirers expose their thinking to other professionals who examine the data and pose questions about them (Guba, 1991). In order to achieve peer debriefing, I established an “audit trail” (p.14). An audit trail is a documentation of the interviews and my field notes. I asked a colleague to be the second coder to make sure my coding was consistent, and to reveal potential biases and assumptions that I might have made. To establish inter-rater reliability, the second coder examined 25 percent of my data. She coded one set of data pertaining to one student which included: two interviews with the student participant, two interviews with the family members, two interviews with the teachers and one home observation.

Tinsley and Weiss (2000) explain that agreement among different raters serves to maintain the “measurement errors within acceptable limits” (p. 96). Tinsely and Weiss explain that the agreement between coders means that the two raters were both precise. My colleague’s coding instantly matched seventy nine percent of the coding that I did. During the discussions,

we both agreed to make changes on seventeen percent of the data. Four percent of the data remained unresolved, so we reviewed the data and discussed them together then we resorted to change the code completely or code using another existing code.

Fourth, to achieve trustworthiness, Guba (1991) advises to test the overall report or case study with source groups before publishing. Therefore, I discussed the findings of the research with participants and listened to their interpretive comments before I published or disseminated any of the results. This was an on-going practice in which I always returned to participants after doing an initial analysis of the data from interviews and observations and checked with them, shared my interpretative comments, and got their feedback. Bringing the data back to the participants for confirmation gave the participants the chance to evaluate accuracy, correct erroneous information, and authenticate the findings of the study to achieve trustworthiness.

## CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of research that examined the perceptions of the students, parents, and teachers of Arab immigrant high schoolers. Specifically, this study answers the following questions:

1. What are four Arab immigrant high school students' perceptions about their backgrounds and home literacy practices?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about the students' backgrounds and home literacy practices?
3. What are Arab immigrant parents' perceptions about their home environments and home literacy practices?

In addition to describing each participants' perceptions, this chapter highlights the formation of students' cultural, positional, and social identities as a product of their specific backgrounds. As presented in chapter 3, I conducted interviews with students, their parents, and their teachers, along with home observations. The data analysis looked at each group of participants and explored the participants' conceptions on literacy, examined their perceptions regarding the home environments while looking, from students, parents, and teachers' points of views, at conditions that contributed to students' success as well as the conditions which challenged students. In addition, the data revealed relevant information about the formations of the identities of each of the participants.

## **Students' Perceptions about their Home literacy Practices and Backgrounds**

**Home literacy Practices.** Students talked extensively about their home literacy practices. A recurring theme was the presence of a support system which helped students do better academically. In their responses, students emphasized the importance of family members and friends.

***Support by family members.*** Students described their daily study habits and routines and revealed pertinent information about the role of parents in their daily literacy routines. Parents were part of the students' literacy routines in two ways: first, parents directly supported the students academically such as in the case of Eman, a high-achieving student who stated, "My dad helps me in Math. I would translate it to my dad in Arabic and he will solve it for me and he will explain to me how he solved it." Second, when unable to provide direct support, parents monitored their children's school work. For example, they made sure homework was complete and did multiple checks that students finished all school work before they were able to join the others for family time.

Academic support did not come from parents, exclusively; it also involved older siblings in the family, such as in the case of Ahmad, the low-achieving student. When in need of help, Ahmad turned to his older brother, who recently earned his GED since he could not attend school anymore after he turned eighteen. Ahmad said, "My older brother is a lot good at math, so he helps me in math especially after the summer break when I forgot how to do things." Not only did Ahmad seek the help of his older brother, he also stated that sometimes he "help[ed] [his] younger brothers with their homework when they need that." During the home visit (observation, November 25, 2015), as they came out to join the family in the family room, Ahmad asked his little brothers whether they had finished their homework for the next day.

Similarly, Eman said, “My oldest sister mostly helps me with my homework. At least she helps me twice a week and especially in science. Sometimes if I have any other questions my dad also helps me with them.” During the midweek home visit (observation, November 11, 2015), Eman’s older sister arrived from college and asked Eman if she needed any help because she was going to be busy with her own studying shortly. During the weekend home visit, Eman’s dad talked to her about the homework she had for the coming week. Her father was telling her how to go about reviewing a list of twenty-five difficult vocabulary words, which were frustrating her.

For the other students, parental support was not as direct and consistent. Manal stated, “My dad barely helps me. I don’t ask him because I know that he has forgotten about most of the stuff. Once he helped me in Algebra- it took him some time to remember how to do it, but he finally did.” Even though her parents did not provide support on a daily basis, she, like Eman and Ahmad, knew that support was available to her when she needed it.

The other low-achieving student, Hassan, was somewhat different. He rejected any direct academic support by family, even though both his mother and uncle had college degrees. Hassan indicated, “I do not let anyone help me with my school work at home. I am the one responsible for my performance and not my family.” During both home visits (observation, October 3 and November 10, 2015), Hassan was always in his room: one time working on his writing assignment and the other time on his iPad, alone. Hassan emphasized that he preferred if his family supported him from the outside by motivating him. Hassan explained, “People in my family encourage me to do whatever I want to do as a major, while others advise me with a better future career but they do not force it on me.” However, this motivation and support sometimes transformed into an expectation or a demand to do well at school. Similarly, Manal,

the high-achieving student stated, “My dad doesn’t like it when I fail a test, no matter how hard it is, there are no excuses. He doesn’t even wanna talk to the teacher about it, all what he knows is that he accepts only good grades.” While Manal’s father demanded high grades, for the lower achieving students, Hassan and Ahmad, it was not a demand for high grades that their parents put forth, but rather for responsibility. Ahmad indicated,

Like my father always tells me that they came here for us- for a better future for us. And my dad left his mom and his brother in my home country and my mom too left her mom there, so I have to make them happy by doing well in school.

Similarly, Hassan told of a time he was recognized as he showed progress and he said, said, “I felt really proud. It made my mother proud too and that’s the most important thing.”

Hassan sometimes felt pressured when his parents compared him to other achievers, leading him to believe that some parents negatively impacted their children with their direct attention. As Hassan expressed, “If parents talk down to students and always compare them to others, that does not help.” He further added, “The great pressure from your family which keeps telling you that you are stupid, you are failure, and you don’t comprehend anything” was not helpful.

In addition to support, students expressed that the home environment must be conducive to learning. Hassan said, “At home, students do better if they have a specific time when they study. Also a specific place. I study in my room alone. When I finish, I come out.” When I visited Hassan’s house during the weekdays (observation, November 10, 2015), he was in his room the whole time finishing his school work. The house was quiet and the TV was off. Manal also said, “I have my own space and no one can disturb me at all at home.” During the home visit, (observation, November 18, 2015) Manal was in her room in the basement doing her homework with the door closed. Her sister was also studying with her friend in her room with

the door closed. All three TVs in the house were turned off in both home visits. Ahmad also focused on his surroundings and believed that learning requires a quiet environment and focus. He said, “Distractions at home from other siblings while a person does his homework is not helpful for students’ grades.”

***Support by friends.*** The two high-achieving students, Manal and Eman, who were friends from school, acknowledged the support from friends to advance academically. Manal stated, “If you don’t understand, find someone to study with. I go to my friend’s house and study with her. We do better together. She is also a good student like me.” This was evident in the weekend observation at Manal’s house (observation, October 4, 2015) as her friend Eman was just leaving after having finished reviewing for their advanced history class together all morning. When Eman’s parents picked her up, they dropped her younger to study with Manal’s younger sister who was also in the same class. The two girls went to their room and closed the door to study together. Similarly, Eman reflected on the support of friends saying, “My friends help me with my homework, my sister also.” Eman and Manal believed that support from friends could lead to success. Manal furthermore explained, “If students have someone who help them outside of school, they can get a better grade.” Manal added, “I also like study groups like when you saw me this morning studying with my friend, I understand more than when I study by myself. I feel bored if I study by myself.” In the same way, Eman said, “My friends influence me positively, they push me to do well in school especially when we meet together in the library to study together especially when there are things on the test I do not understand, we study together in the library using Quizlet.” So support of friends was important for both Manal and Eman. These two participants mentioned that they relied to their friends for doing homework together, studying after school, going to the library, and preparing for tests.

The two low-achieving students, Hassan and Ahmad, did not focus on direct academic support from friends such as study buddies or study groups. However, both, Hassan and Ahmad revealed that their friends supported them indirectly by doing things such as motivating them to do better and improving their language skills. As Hassan stated, “There are friends like Ali, he challenges me to do better at school and expands my thinking.” Similarly, Ahmad stated, “When I am with friends we talk about ourselves and school such as the tests that we took, we discuss them in school and outside school, for example, we do a kind of competition like if I got an A+ in English and my friend did not, we tease each other.” Ahmad also mentioned how his friends were a catalyst in acquiring English, “What you do outside the school also affects your grades for example, good friends – I have friends from another school that I play soccer with them and they help me practice English with them.” Hence, their friends were there for them as moral and motivational support rather than academic support, but still influenced language learning. For Hassan and Ahmad, this was a different kind of support system-not meeting friends outside school to collaborate together, but having friends in their lives that would aid in enhancing their academic performance without being a direct part of the process.

Academic support for most students came mostly from older siblings in the family. In turn, participants helped their younger siblings. Parents provided academic support to students when needed, but most importantly, parents secured the appropriate atmosphere for students to work at home. Friends also offered participants reinforcement and motivation.

In summary, students discussed their home literacy practices and the kind of support they have outside the school. The two high-achieving students, Manal and Eman, were confident that, in difficult homework situations, they could resort to their parents. For Ahmad, the low-achieving student, that was not possible since his parents were not educated, that was

not an option, so he sought his brothers' help. Hassan, the struggling student, believed in his ability to work completely independently since his parents pressured him with direct supervision.

**Students' backgrounds.** In addition to the home literacy practices, another area examined by this study was that of students' background experiences. Students talked extensively about their background experiences in terms of their experiences in their home countries and out of school activities.

*Experiences in the home country.* With the exception of Manal, all student participants had positive perceptions about their literacy and educational experiences in their home countries. Hassan articulated that the curriculum was more rigorous and demanding in his home country, saying, "Students who come from overseas know a lot more than students here- they know a lot because schools pressure you more than here with studying." Eman shared Hassan's opinion, "In America, like in our High School, they only teach the things that the student should know- that's it. In my home country, you study a lot- maybe for 6 hours per day and you have homework every day." The rigor in their precious curricula gave immigrant students an advantage as Eman stated, "Students that come from outside of America, from overseas, are smarter. They are also well educated and they have a lot of things that they know." Similarly, Ahmad reflected on the academic strength and knowledge of immigrant students by saying, "A student who came from overseas has more experiences than people who were born here because they don't travel outside the United States. The environment of immigrant students is different- they care more about school and learning." Because of the rigorous curricula that they had previously experienced, students also expressed familiarity with the subject matter they were currently learning at school. Hassan, Eman, and Ahmad mentioned that they did not have

difficulty in the content matter of science and math courses since they have already learned the subject matter in their home countries. Nonetheless, Hassan was the only student who learned those subjects in English. Eman studied science and Math in French, the focus language of her school in Lebanon, and Ahmad studied science and Math in Arabic, the focus language of his school in Kuwait.

However, all three students also felt pressured by the educational system in their respective home countries. For example, Eman mentioned, “Exams were difficult in that rather than depending on multiple choice questions, they required extensive writing.” This was corroborated by Hassan’s grandmother who explained that Hassan had a private tutor in Lebanon to help him with homework every day.

Manal did not share the same beliefs about schooling in her home country. In fact, Manal never discussed her previous experiences in her home country and the schooling system there. A possible reason could be because Manal was home schooled when she was in Yemen. This was because first, school was far away from where she lived and second, it was not safe for her to be in school. She did acknowledge, just like everyone else, that language was a challenge for her at the beginning. She shared that after a year and a half in the United States and with her great effort at home, she improved academically. Manal described her progress as, “At first everything was difficult for me. I did not understand what teachers were explaining. My ESL classes helped me a lot. They helped me read and understand.”

*Activities outside the school.* When it came to out-of-school activities, students revealed an array of different activities that they participated in. The activities that students engaged in outside school could be classified as recreational, religious, academic, and functional literacy.

Students' recreational activities consisted of hanging out with their parents and siblings, going places with them such as the parks, malls, and lakes; and watching TV. Religious activities consisted of those actions that related to their religious beliefs such as praying and reading the Quran, as all four students mentioned, that one of their daily routines when they get home was to pray first and then have lunch with family. Academic activities were those that directly related to school achievement, such as doing homework or studying for a test. Functional literacy activities consisted of reading and writing activities that involved literacy but were not directly related to school such as helping a sibling with homework, volunteering, surfing the internet, or reading about a topic of interest to them along with extracurricular activities. These activities indirectly enhanced students' learning and contributed to their general knowledge and language acquisition. In this section, I focus on functional literacy since it developed and enriched students' literacy practices.

**Functional literacy.** Eman and Manal, the high-achieving students were more invested in their school and did more volunteering than the other two students: they volunteered during summer school as well as after school to coach other EL students while reading, and were always visible after school to help teachers with their work. Eman explained, "Sometimes I help my teacher check papers and I help teach other students after school." Manal also helped her teachers. She volunteered three full days before the beginning of school to help the ESL department. Manal did not hesitate to volunteer for any activity that her teachers asked her to do. Her science teacher was impressed in how she jumped into action and brought her siblings to help, too, when needed. She said,

She is a person driven to do a good job and she's not afraid of hard work, I mean, most kids would say gotta rake some leaves- nope! Gotta do some hard work, Nope!" But this girl jumped right in and helped move those bricks and she was happy to be participating

and she enjoyed it so much that she got her siblings to help also, so she was a leader in the sense like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry.

In addition to before-and-after school involvement, Eman and Manal mentioned that they were always available during “Student Support Time”, a forty-five minute period in the morning once a week to support struggling students. They volunteered in classrooms to help other students with their work.

Eman stood out from the rest of the student participants in that she was the only student participant who was involved in extracurricular school activities. Manal joined the cross country team in eighth grade. This extracurricular activity, helped her develop her functional literacy. The running club expanded Eman’s English language abilities, her circle of friends, and consequently her support system. Eman said,

Before joining cross country, I barely used English with my friends, but in cross country, I was required to speak English because everybody was speaking in English so it helped me learn new words and it helped me a little bit to get rid of my accent.

In contrast to Eman and Manal, Ahmad and Hassan, the two struggling students, were not part of the school culture. First, Ahmad and Hassan did not participate in extracurricular activities at school. Second, although, Ahmad and Hassan did stay after school but only to hang out with other students. Third, they did not volunteer or participate in any clubs or assist any teacher. And even though they were present at school during “Student Support time”, they stayed in the cafeteria to socialize with other friends.

Outside the school, Hassan and Ahmad had many interests that fell under functional literacy. Hassan had a passion for documentaries. He stated,

I like to watch documentaries on my iPad like about animals or political talk shows. I watch them in both, English and Arabic. But I am not the kind that if I see the kids are playing basketball outside I’d want to join them. I haven’t even tried to join any clubs at school because I do not like any of them.

During the home visit (observation, November 10, 2015), Hassan was in his room all the time using his iPad. Hassan also mentioned his interest in animals and how he always researched zoos “around the world” and visited their websites to learn more about animals. Hassan said, “I am good at animals- I know the breeds of animals, I can tell you what each animal’s breed is. Sometimes I operate on animals like this one time in Lebanon I operated on a chick [after watching a You Tube video] and he lived happily ever after. Hassan also indicated that he was fascinated with photography and that he took this hobby seriously, “I also take pictures of nature. I collect pictures. I have a lot of pictures. One time I took an exceptional picture of the lightening one day that was amazing. I sent it to National Geographic.” During one of the home visits (observation, October 3, 2015), Hassan showed me some of the pictures he had taken on his cell phone. Those were mostly pictures of nature that captured a moment.

Additionally, as part of functional literacy activities, Hassan liked watching documentaries and political talk shows in Arabic and English, “I have an iPad and I always read to get information to talk about with my friends. I also get information from the TV. We argue together, we do not just discuss things.” Such functional literacy activities might not be recognized by school, but they involved challenging reading and critical thinking, and gave Hassan experiences and knowledge in different domains.

Like Hassan, Ahmad did not do any volunteering, nor did he join any clubs at school. As a recreational, after-school activity, Ahmad was a member of a soccer team that he founded along with his friends without the supervision of any adult. Players scheduled their games and got together to play on weekend and after school on the field of a charter school. This extracurricular activity helped Ahmad develop his conversational English, learn social skills, and be more motivated to perform better at school. Ahmad said,

I have friends from another school that I play soccer with them and they help me practice English. They also talk about their school and I know that my school is better than their school so we are in a competition who gets better grades.

In addition to sports, Ahmad was very much involved in his community. He was known for his recitations and people would hire him specifically to be present and recite poetry on all occasions as he said, “This is the thing I’ve been doing for more than 3 years. I started doing it in my home country. I do it in every event that happens. They ask for me, they know me by name.” Such poetry required reading several poems in his native language, comprehending them, and practicing how to deliver them. As he explained, “Those are poets that we know from the community; they write the poems and give few to me to read and I pick which one I want to recite for which occasion.” During my home visit to Ahmad’s house (observation, October 17, 2015), he was busy planning with his friend over the phone for a big night’s event where he was going to recite Islamic poetry in front of four hundred people. After he finished with his friend, he started planning with his mother and family. Ahmad is a shy student so he kept this reciting skill to himself and his inner circle of friends except one special teacher that he confided in and shared his talent with.

For any person looking from the outside at the two pairs of participants: successful and struggling, it would seem that the successful students were more invested in their school. However, data revealed that even though the two struggling students were distant from teachers and school activities, they had incorporated a different array of functional literacy activities outside of school. Therefore, one cannot argue that the students’ lack of participation in school activities may have negatively affected their academic success.

## **Parents' Perceptions about the Home Literacy Practices**

Analysis of the perceptions of parents/family members in the study regarding their children's home literacy practices yielded two major themes. Those themes were similar to the ones that students talked about in their interviews: home literacy practices and children's backgrounds and experiences.

**The home literacy practices.** Home literacy practices was one of the major themes that kept coming up in the responses of the parents of student participants. Parents' responses related to home literacy practices revealed four dominant, interconnected ideas: the value of education, educational expectations, students' autonomy, and parental support. Parents' valuing education lead them to create the space for it and made them have high expectations for their children. The children realized those expectations, and thus were motivated to become high achiever and attain college degrees which made them become independent learners. What follows is an account of the four sub-themes that emerged about the perceptions of the parent participants regarding their children's home literacy practices.

***Value of education.*** The importance of education was one subtheme that surfaced in the responses of parents of student participants. The data collected by interviewing parents revealed that all parents of the student participants placed high value on their children's education. Parents considered education as top priority for their children. Hassan's grandmother remarked, "Education is very valuable for any person. Every child should have some good education. If they are not successful at school, they go into vocational, but they should definitely have some kind of education." Manal's parent emphasized education for personal and social reasons,

Education is very valuable for us as a family in the American society for many reasons: first, it keeps your knowledge going, it makes you look smart wherever you go, you know

what you are talking about- it makes people look at you in a different way- to respect you, and you choose the job you want, you live the life you want, you live in a same neighborhood, same environment, you don't have obstacles.

Eman's parents indicated that they moved to the United States because they cared for their children's education, stating, "We wanted the best education for them." In addition, Eman's father explained the ethical value they place on education. He said,

Education is very important in my family's life. It is everything. An individual without education is a mere corpse. Education adds respect to the individual: self-respect and people's respect. Education also gives an individual more self-confidence. I want all my kids to be educated with college degrees. This comes in first place- before food.

The same idea of how education provides security was expressed by Ahmad's parents. Discussing the importance of education Ahmad's dad stated that education, "secures a good future and good job. I would never accept that he quits school for any reason. Learning and earning a school diploma is a priority." Thus, according to parents of all student participants, education was the number one priority in the lives of these Arab families. Parents' high value of education was transferred to their children. That was clear since the responses of children reflected how their parents demanded high grades and how children sought support from family and friends outside of school to do better in school.

*Educational expectations.* High expectations were mentioned again and again by parents in the interviews. For parents, graduating from high school was an accepted pathway for their children. All parents expected their children to earn a college degree. Hassan's parents talked about college as a natural course for all members in their family, a first step in the life goals. As Hassan's grandmother said, "All members finished their college education. All my four children, they would earn their B.A., after that I would teach them driving and once they got a car and a job, they can get married." Hassan's mother also confirmed the educational background of her family, "All his cousins are educated and they play a role model in his life.

All my family members have Masters Degrees and that sets the standards for my child to achieve higher in order to be like them.” Manal’s mom encouraged her to always do her best and “always study and get good grades.” Manal was also expected to be like her dad who had a medical degree. Manal’s father wanted his daughter to pursue the highest level of education possible and “get as many degrees as she can because I feel like the only way she will succeed is if she had some kind of degree.” Similar expectations applied to Eman as her mother expressed, “I expect her to finish college and go beyond that in higher education.” Eman’s parents guided and encouraged her to be an engineer, keeping in mind her sharp math abilities. Eman’s mother explained,

I expect her to be an engineer and I see that she is going to be a successful one therefore I encourage her to do her best. I drew her attention that her math skills are good for engineering and she followed my advice.

Ahmad’s dad too had high expectations for his son: “In the future, I expect him to do well. I do not know what exactly he is going to be, but I see him achieving well.” Thus, all parents envisioned their children with high degrees and as educated individuals. Similarly, parents and children shared the same perceptions in that children’s responses also showed that they had college plans for majors and thought of future careers.

*Students’ autonomy.* All parents affirmed that their children were independent in doing their school work at home. Manal’s parents confirmed that she was an independent learner. In Manal’s case, her mom stated that she was unable to assist her since she herself did not finish high school and is not fluent in English. Manal’s mother said,

What makes her do well at school is that she is independent in her learning. She comes home and does her homework by herself. She does not depend on anyone for help. I do not know English so I cannot help her. I trust what she’s doing and she tells me that she she’s doing well at school.

This was also seen during the weekday home visit (observation, November 18, 2015). As Manal came into the living room, her mom asked her directly if she finished her homework. Manal's father, a medical doctor, was always busy and he could not provide her with the time she needed at home to do her work. He said, "My child always studies alone. Since she was a little kid, she did not have anyone to help her so she learned to be independent." Likewise, Hassan's mother stated that she did not do daily checks with her son. She had resorted to technology to check on how he was doing at school by visiting the teachers' websites and keeping "reminders on my phone for important assignments that teachers post and I keep updating it so I know what's going on at school." During the weekday home visit (observation, November 10, 2015), while Hassan's mom was working with his little brother on his homework and dad was helping the little sister with her Math homework in a different room, Hassan was working independently in his bedroom. Similarly, Eman's father explained, "At home my child studies alone. No one helps her." He feels that he cannot help her because he does not know English, but that, "her older sibling helps her if she needed help." Ahmad's mom echoed the same idea, "No one helps him at home. He does his homework on his own. He does not ask anyone for help. He helps his two little brothers at home with homework." Ahmad's dad also mentioned, "I do not follow up with my child on daily basis." The autonomy of the children in going about their studies at home was evident in the parents' responses. Thus, children were intrinsically motivated to do their work and they bore the responsibility to complete their school work, often without direct help from the parents.

By comparing the responses of children and parents, we discover that they were very similar in that both believed in the autonomy of students. Due to the language barrier, parents viewed themselves as being unable to help their children with homework which restricted their

role to daily verbal checks of whether students completed their school work. The two high-achieving students, Manal and Eman, knew that they could resort to their parents only for help in tough homework situations and to get the work done since their parents had higher education in their native language. Ahmad could not ask for support by his parents since they did not have college education, so he resorted to his older brother. Hassan did not allow his parents to interfere with his school work and considered it his own responsibility. All in all, responses of parents and children were similar among all four children since children expressed that they were independent in every day school work and did not resort to family support unless it was necessary. In other words, support by family members was not in the form of daily routine characterized by sitting at a study table and finishing homework or reviewing with children for test. It was routine checkups by parents to make sure children finished their school work before they engaged in other things at home.

***Parental support.*** Though the students had a lot of autonomy, parents were always supportive of their children's education. Parents found it hard to show direct academic support when they had difficulty understanding the American educational system. Parents were not familiar with the credit system at the high school or the graduation requirements. Additionally, English language stood as a barrier that blocked direct communication between parents and their children's teachers. Under these circumstances, it was not easy to show direct academic support and follow up with day-to-day assignments. However, interviews revealed that parents still provided indispensable support for their children. Parents' support took two different forms: providing an environment that is conducive to learning and providing students with a choice in their education.

*Home environment conducive to learning.* All parents believed that the home environment should be conducive for children to learn and took responsibility to ensure that such an environment was created. For example, Ahmad's mother stressed the importance of having a quiet home environment as a critical condition for her children to do well at school. She said, "At home, there should be a quiet environment, a special place where the student studies every day so that he's relaxed and is learning well so that he will never forget what he learns." She added that, "If he has homework to do, I won't let anyone go into his room," because she does not want him to be distracted. In fact, even though there were seven people in Ahmad's house (observation, October 17 and November 25, 2015), I noticed during both visits that the house was very quiet and tidy. In addition, Ahmad's family did not have a cable subscription or a dish satellite and the TV was off always during the weekdays visit. Similarly, Hassan's grandmother described in detail the kind of environment that parents should maintain for their children to be successful at school. She said,

Attention must be given by the parents like teaching him at school, preparing him for school, creating a good environment for him to study and do his homework after school, all of these are important factors of how students perform at school. For example, I used to dedicate the time after I get back from work and the kids from school to my kid's homework. I closed the door of my house until evening time (that's when my kids have finished their homework, had dinner, and went to bed), then I can receive guests or other family members at my home. TV was also not allowed during the week days. TV was allowed on the weekends only. I would purchase the movies and watch them first to make sure they are appropriate for kids before they can see them. This will make me comfortable if the children watched the movies while I was not there.

Similarly, Eman's mother maintained that the uninterrupted study environment and the quiet area at home were among the important conditions that parents must ensure for their children at home. Eman's mother explained how parents can contribute to having successful students. According to her screaming and loud noises from the TV are "distractions to children" and she emphasized that,

Parents should always preach their children to do well at school, to stay focused. If they feel that the cellphone, iPad or TV are taking a lot of their kid's time, parents should advise their children that it is not the right time to use electronics when you have homework. Generally speaking, the control from parents is very important.

Corroborating this, during the weekdays visit to Eman's house (observation, November 11, 2015) during the midafternoon and after the children came back from school, the TV was always turned off and everyone was busy doing something different. However, during the weekend visits I noticed the TV was on and that some members in the family were watching Arabic programs on TV.

Valuing education and making it the number one priority in their lives, made parents take care not to burden their children with too many responsibilities beyond school work. Hassan's mother indicated that Hassan occasionally mowed the grass in summer as he was available, but that he was not responsible for any chores in the house because "his sole responsibility is to take care of himself and his studies. He does not even help with his siblings. I just want him to do well at school, so I do not keep him busy." Likewise, Eman's mother indicated that Eman did chores only on the weekend, and they included doing the dishes and making her bed. Eman's mother made sure to assign chores that "don't take from their learning time so basically they tidy their beds, and tidy their books."

Similarly, Ahmad's dad affirmed that house chores were not part of his son's responsibilities, "My child does not help inside the house. He is not required to do so ... He does not clean his room regularly, his mom does that for him." In all the home visits (observation, October 3 and November 10, 2015), I did not see Hassan doing any chores. He was always in his room reading or doing his homework. Also, Manal's mom indicated that house chores come second in importance compared to studying, "My older daughter helps me in making food and she is a good cook. She does this only if she has time and after she finishes

her homework.” During the weekend visit (observation, October 4, 2015), Manal was working on her assignment in AP History, while her mother was cleaning the kitchen and preparing lunch. During the midweek visit, all children were in their rooms doing their assignments. So in all parents’ responses, homework, school, and learning came first, before everything else. This was also communicated by all four students, high and low-achieving, as they acknowledged that their parents have created the same conducive environment at home for them to do their homework. Students’ environment was characterized by uninterrupted study time, limited TV time, and less responsibilities at home. Students reflected that they had a lot of time for recreational activities since they were not burdened with chores. This made parents perceptions about the home environment alike.

***Choice in education.*** Though a few parents in the study named specific professions they wished their children to pursue, the rest of the parents were open to letting their children decide what they wanted to do. They did not push nor did they try to force a major, career, or certain path on their children. Hassan’s mom indicated that Hassan had a choice, “When it comes to in-state or out-of-state university, I do not mind either- whatever he chooses and is better for him.” Ahmad’s father also expressed that his son was free to choose his career path, “I encourage him to attain a degree, but he can pick what he wants to be. The only thing I force him to do is to go to school until he graduates.” Manal’s father encouraged and pushed his daughter to do well in school and follow her dreams without forcing any kind of education upon her. He made sure not to pressure his daughter and to only “direct her to study and stay on top of things so that whatever she has strength in, she can major in.” Ahmad’s mother supported her son to become an engineer but she thought that being a doctor suited his personality more, “He likes to be an engineer, but I would like for him to be a doctor. However, whatever he

chooses, I will agree with him. I love for him to be a doctor because this profession is honorable.” The perceptions of most parents indicated high attainment when it came to education; however without taking away their children’s freedom to choose what they wanted to do.

With respect to this subtheme, children also indicated that freedom of choice in that they did not mention that they were burdened to carry on the family business, for example. Even for Manal, whose father is a medical doctor, she mentioned that she was expected to accomplish a high degree but her father never indicated medicine, per se, he gave her the choice in her career. What parents focused was college-level education and beyond and that was also communicated in children’s responses. From another point of view, there was no difference between the high-achieving and low-achieving students in this matter since parents on both sides gave their children freedom of choice.

#### **Educational experiences of Arabic immigrant families in their home countries.**

Another major theme that surfaced from interviews with parents was related to the backgrounds of the families. Similar to the responses of student participants, parents talked extensively about their backgrounds, especially their educational experiences in the home country.

*Educational experiences in the home countries.* In their conversations, parents expressed opinions about the curriculum and drew comparisons between schools in the United States and their home countries. Parents unanimously voiced their opinion that their children had a solid foundation in various subjects. Like, the students, they attributed this to the rigorous curriculum that their children experienced in their home countries. Hassan’s mother explained that immigrant children do well at schools in the United States because, “They have been prepared more and from a younger age. They are smarter, more serious, and know more since

schools start teaching reading and writing from the first year a child goes to school at age three.” Eman’s parents also affirmed how rigorous and difficult the curriculum was in their home country and that it required working extensively every night. Eman’s mother who supervised her children’s school work stated, “There is a lot of pressure in terms of learning in my home country. For example when my kids were there, like in 4th grade, they stayed from 3 pm till 10 pm doing homework and studying every single day.”

Nonetheless, despite the solid educational foundation that the students had in their home countries, parents felt that language stood as a barrier between the children and their success in schools in the United States. Hassan’s mother explained, “Language makes him get behind because English is his second language and not his native language.” Similarly, Manal’s mother explained that the reason her children struggle in U.S. schools is because, “In my home country, education is all in Arabic. Students do not study English until higher levels like the upper middle school, and that is why they struggle when they come to schools here.” Eman’s mother explained that, “When we first arrived, the schooling system was different for us, as well as the language (we are French educated in the family), and the way of studying and homework routine was different” and she felt that was why her children struggled at the beginning. Ahmad’s father also admitted that until his son overcame the language barrier, it negatively affected his son’s school performance, “At first he was a beginner at school- he had a rough start due to his limited language, he needed to kick off, but now he is used to everything, and he has launched well this year.” However, the parents also believed that if their children mastered the English language, they would do great at school. For instance, Manal’s mother said that they chose Manal’s current school so that they, “We wanted them to be in a white American school so that they learn the language faster and become successful and go to

college.” Similarly, Hassan’s mother commented, “Language makes him gets behind because English is his second language and not his native language.”

Overall, parents considered the education in their home countries to be rigid and rigorous. Parents and students favored the American education since it was student-centered and narrowed down to the most essential skills and knowledge without burdening students with myriad of topics and requiring them to master many subjects like the curricula in their home countries. As Ahmad’s father explained, “Students here in the United States love to go to school, they are excited and motivated. In my home country, we have to push students to go to school.” Eman’s parents communicated the same idea about how the curriculum in their home country fatigues the students and also added that, “Schools in Lebanon pressure the students. Schools in the USA only teach what the student needs without all the additional things that are sometimes unnecessary in the curriculum which just tires the student.” Hassan’s mother reiterated the same thing about how students were pressured by learning in their home countries compared to the more easy-going methods in the United States, “In the USA, teachers only teach to the point, they focus on the things that are important to the child and what the child needs in everyday life.

Parents’ responses revealed that they placed high value on education which raised the bar for their children and set the tone for high expectations. Parents’ responses also revealed that their children were independent learners. In addition, parents asserted the importance of the environment that is conducive to learning at home. Parents’ responses corresponded with students’ perceptions who also discussed the support by parents, the conducive home environment, along with valuing literacy and the high expectations their parents had for them.

The responses of parents and children were identical when they expressed their opinions about students' background experiences in their home countries. Children as well as parents had firm perceptions that the rigorous curricula in their home countries had provided them with solid literacy and educational experience that alleviated the difficulty in content matter and made students feel they were smart compared to their peers. The only disadvantage that both sides expressed was the language impediment which, in everybody's opinion, was not an obstacle anymore after the first year of being in the country. Despite the rigor in the curricula, both parents and children expressed their discomfort in their previous educational methods and all of them were impressed with the American curricula that was practical and relevant to the students' needs.

### **Perceptions of Teachers about Students' Backgrounds and Literacy Practices**

Data collected from interviews with teachers revealed the teachers' perceptions about the backgrounds and literacy practices of the students of Arab immigrant families. These perceptions were related to the participants as students, the parental support that students have at home, students' languages, and students' extracurricular activities and hobbies.

**Perceptions about the participants as students.** Data revealed that the teachers had positive perceptions about the practices and attitudes of students towards learning. Teachers expressed how the participants were serious about their education and diligent workers in that they would always get their school work done. Hassan's first teacher praised his efforts to complete the work, "When you have him do work, saying, he usually works on it right away. If he's doing a project he gets his work done all of the time." Hassan's second teacher also indicated, "Academically, he tries very hard, he turns in his work, I think he has a B in this class." Similarly, Manal's second teacher noted, "She is a hard worker and that distinguishes

her from other students.” Manal’s second teacher also commented that, “She is a person driven to do a good job and she’s not afraid of hard work.” Similar comments were made by Manal’s teacher, “She is not very assertive, but she is diligent. She works hard at everything I give her as a task. But interacting with other students- when it is appropriate she interacts.” Eman’s hard work and diligence were also highlighted by her first teacher, “Eman’s really driven. She’s really a hard worker, she wants just to succeed.” Her teacher further specified, “What distinguishes her from other students is that she doesn’t like failure. She doesn’t like failure athletically. She doesn’t like failure academically and she’s persistent to solve the problem so she doesn’t give up.” Eman’s second teacher also provided a general statement regarding the persistence of all immigrant students in school, “The immigrant students that we have here do excel and are the ones that get A’s in my class.” Likewise, Ahmad’s first teacher noticed his serious attitude towards his education despite his frequent absences from school, “He always asks what he missed in assignments so I give it to him and he gets them completed.” Ahmad’s teacher continued that he would not hesitate to get his work done, “He’ll get it done right away, he doesn’t sit there and waste time so he seems like he’s a hard worker when he’s here and when I give him the assignments to make up, he gets them done.” His second teacher also noted the same thing, “He’s always trying to make up work because he’s missing the days but he gets it done.”

Teachers also mentioned in the interviews that the students were open to help and that they did not hesitate to ask for it when needed. For example, Hassan’s second teacher noted, “If he doesn’t understand something he’ll come in and want to ask, he’ll get extra help.” Manal’s first teacher commented that Manal was more attentive than other students in her class and that she was open to help without feeling embarrassed to ask for help because, “She just

wants to learn what she's supposed to learn and she'll do that." Eman's first teacher remarked Eman's enthusiasm to learn, "She's one of those kids that is highly driven. She seems to care because she asks for advice a lot." She also noted, "She actually comes in after school. She comes in multiple times a day with any questions she has." Eman's English teacher affirmed, "She wants to do well, she comes for extra help if she's struggling with something, and wants to work with you on essays and assignments so she can understand what she needs to do. Ahmad's second teacher also remarked that he was reserved but open to help, "He answers questions when spoken to, he participates and he asks for help when he needs it, he does his work, he's all around an awesome student."

Teachers' responses about participants as students revealed similar answers to parents in that teachers had realized the cultural values parents had instilled in their children such as students' seriousness and diligence. Teachers' answers about student in class were also similar to parents' since they distinguished students as hard workers and that they are motivated to learn.

Despite all this attention to students' academic behaviors, teachers were not able to go beyond class performance and recognize students individually in their classrooms with complete awareness of their lives outside the class. Teachers rarely talked about personal information regarding students such as students' country of origin and/or students' interests and academic future plans.

***Students' countries of origin.*** Teachers knew that their students were Arabic, but they did not recognize the specific countries of origin of their students. Ahmad's first teacher only recognized Ahmad as an Arabic student without knowing which specific country he came from, commenting, "I do not know where he's from because he's not as outgoing as other students so

it is sad to say but I do not know.” In turn, when asked whether his teacher identified his country of origin, Ahmad indicated,

He knows that I am Iraqi and not Lebanese because one time he called me “Ahmad” with a Lebanese accent, but I corrected him saying I am not Lebanese, I am Iraqi and this is how you say my name. I wasn’t trying to be a racist but I just wanted him to call me right. He said he hears Lebanese students saying it like that. I told him this is how Lebanese people say it and this is how Iraqi say it. But he did not ask me about other differences between the two.

Hassan’s second teacher also could not identify either where Hassan was from, which she attributed to the large number of students she sees each day. She said, “He might have told me where he is from but it was the first week of school. But I have 120 kids, I don’t remember if he told me where he’s from.” Similarly, Manal’s first teacher wished she could talk to her a little more because, “I think in general it kinda helps to know where kids come from- not specifically which country they came from but to know in general where they are from, and to know that they are from somewhere else.”

On the contrary, Eman’s second teacher was familiar with Eman’s home country due to a summer assignment she did as a prerequisite for the course, “I remember reading them and thinking oh, that’s really interesting because some of the kids get to do their fun summer things in Lebanon.” Similarly, the same teacher was also familiar with where Manal was originally from since she was able to make connections between Manal and students she had in class previously. She said,

I thought of 2 other students who are from Yemen, and I know that she had got that same thing like them, just like let’s just get the job done. She reminds me of that, they’re all committed and jump in without being afraid of hard work- that’s what I see from her culture.

In contrast, in the whole interview with Eman’s first teacher, she referred to Eman’s family as an Arabic immigrant family without indicating the country of origin.

The country of origin marked the first discrepancy in the responses between parents and teachers. At the time that teachers were not sure or they did not recognize students' country of origin, parents always referred to themselves in their conversations according to their countries of origin. Parents constantly gave examples about their children's experiences and the experiences on their home countries by specifically naming the country. This placed more importance on the differences embedded in the countries of origin.

***Parental support.*** Teachers remarked that parents of immigrant families played an essential role in their children's lives. In all interviews, teachers agreed about the importance of parental support and the role adults play in children's education by helping them set goals for themselves and recognize the value of education. Hassan's first teacher stated, "I think it starts with what's going on at home, the experiences that they are given, the opportunities they are given. I think parents at home come first." Hassan's second teacher also noted, "For some immigrant families that come here, education is very important to them, it is their number one thing. They're very involved with their kids. But other families are not." Similarly, Eman's first teacher indicated, "I think that's why we're doing so well. I think that the parents realize that the key to success is going to be a good education so they are so supportive of what we do in the classroom." Eman's teacher explained that immigrant families have created a culture of learning that values education. She said, "There is a tremendous push from many of the families- not just one, their strictness to have their kids do well." Eman's first teacher attributed the reason for such determination to succeed as to their status as immigrant families, "I mean one of the reasons they came here was for safe environment and for better education for their kids, so they push them a little bit more." The same point about Arab immigrant families was

stressed by Eman's second teacher who said, "I do notice often that in the Arab families that I work with whether they are recent immigrants or not, that school is valued highly in the family."

Still, and while acknowledging the role of family in academic achievement, teachers did not say anything that indicated that they were aware of the actual support that students were getting from their families and they did not mention any efforts to find out. Hassan's teachers indicated that they were unsure about who supported him at home. Hassan's first teacher mentioned, "I am assuming that he gets help at home because he is not struggling, nor does he ask me or tell me that something bad is happening at his household." His first teacher was also not familiar with Hassan's parents and how they interacted with Hassan around school issues. He stated, "If I were to meet his parents, I could better tell if his parents would send him to out-of-state university or not." In addition, Hassan's second teacher also stated, "I assume that his family is able to pick him up late- I can't remember if he came straight after school, but I don't know if it (his effort) is coming straight from him or if it is coming from his family." Not only was the teacher uncertain about support at home either- rather he seemed to make inferences, "He seems to be very diligent and cares about his education and I assume this comes from the family, but that is my assumption."

Adults in the family supported their children by guiding them and expecting them to be achievers. Manal's first teacher explained, "Usually if they don't have a parent that cares or somebody else that intervenes they just don't seem that they do it on their own." Furthermore, Manal's first teacher stressed the importance of parental expectations which drive immigrant students to do better at school, "I have some immigrant students who do really well like the twins we had a couple of years ago, Manal, for example, some of them excel more, so over all the ones who were born here."

However, like Hassan's teachers, Manal's first teacher was also unaware of Manal's home literacy practices. As she explained,

I don't really know if her family supports her academically, I would guess that they let her know that it is important that she gets good grades, because it doesn't seem like otherwise she would try so hard. It seems that they have installed a good work ethics in her somewhere along the line.

What Manal's first teacher inferred about her was from Manal's behavior in class without any direct concrete knowledge from Manal or her family. Similarly, Manal's second teacher said, "I don't know about out-of-school support from her family. I know she gets along quiet well with her siblings because I see them always together at school, but she hasn't said anything in a way or another about support at home. I don't know anything about her family. She has not said anything." Manal's second teacher similarly had very little definite knowledge, stating, "I speculate that she is from Yemen but I am not sure."

Similarly, Eman's first teacher was not able to indicate what kind of support Eman received at home. In fact, she specifically stated that she could not go beyond assumptions, stating, "I don't know what kind of school support her family provides her with, but they provide her obviously with the food she needs, with the shelter. I assume the family has a quiet place for her to study. I assume that they may encourage her to do her homework but they are just assumptions." Unlike the first teacher who made assumptions without recognizing them as such, Eman's second teacher was straight-forward in stating that she did not know anything definitive Eman's family. She said,

I mean, directly, I can't say that I can see anything because I did not have direct contact with her family. I did not see them at conferences, so I can't say that I see any support, but to me I always I always assume that there must be some support going on at home if students must succeed.

Likewise, Ahmad's first teacher realized the importance of knowing about the family in students' education, "I think I wish I would engage the family beforehand, that way I know a little about the background. But I don't have time to do that." In fact, Ahmad's first teacher believed that if the student has not been in trouble in class or failing that there is no need for him to contact the parents, "I do not see any support from his parents or anyone at home. I haven't had any discussions yet with them, he's making up the work so far." Ahmad's second teacher acknowledged the lack of connection with parents and that he had not seen the parents yet. However, he believed since Ahmad was doing well, he must be supported at home, "I mean I haven't spoken with a parent, I never needed to call home in a negative manner, I've never received any email, I've never seen any parental communication, so I don't know how the support is."

Both parents and teachers' responses were very distant from each other. Parents clearly communicated that they have facilitated a support system at home for their children to do well at school. They encouraged their children to seek help when needed, followed up with them on daily basis, and instilled in them the desire to learn. Teachers, on the other side, were not aware of this side of their students' lives. Even when teachers had a light idea about it, they were hesitant to confirm this knowledge about their students' lives outside the classroom.

*Students' languages.* Interviews with teachers revealed positive attitudes about students' native languages. Teachers did not believe that speaking another language at home interfered with students' learning English. Hassan's English teacher believed that students' native languages play a role in maintaining ties with their families at home and, "I think in the long run, speaking another language will benefit him because they will end up learning two languages." Hassan's first teacher did not consider speaking another language would

necessarily impact a student's development of English, "To learn English, just because you speak Arabic at home, it's not gonna make a student forget words in English." Eman's first teacher did not necessarily believe that speaking another language could hinder her learning English, yet felt that her lack of English proficiency, "limits her mastering of some of the rich vocabulary that she has to know- the academic vocabulary."

Because teachers were cognizant that English was not the native language of the student participants, they acknowledged the language barrier that stood as an impediment that hindered students' academic achievement. Hassan's first teacher indicated, "A person who knows English a little better has a better chance because it is less of a language barrier compared to the student who is learning brand new." Hassan's second teacher also noted, "I think that kids coming over have a lot of additional issues that they have to deal with –the language barrier has gotta be overwhelming when they first get here." Ahmad's second teacher noted, "I am assuming that schools are a little bit different overseas than when you come to a brand new place...Last year it was a struggle because of the language." Likewise, Manal's first teacher said, "Their school performance is affected by how well they know the language and so forth." Eman's second teacher realized the frustration of immigrant students who try to achieve high but are faced by the language barrier. He stated, "When they want to achieve more it is frustrating for them...they don't know what some of the basic vocabulary mean, they know how to say things one way but they don't know the multiple ways that you say those things." All of the teachers, parents, and students' opinions were similar in that they acknowledged the difficulty that students faced when they tried to achieve high but their language limited them. However, unlike teachers, who believed that learning another language does not impede students from achieving even in the long run, parents expressed their concerns how learning

Arabic interfered with students advancing in English and how it impacted their academic achievement even though on the short run. The difference between teachers and parents' responses showed that teachers placed value on students' native languages and considered it an asset, while parents considered that native language limited their children academically in American schools. Later on, in this study, we will see that parents valued their native languages as being a culture preservative.

On the bright side, the language barrier had a positive impact on students' conduct in class. All teachers described newcomers as quiet and not trouble makers since they do not possess the prevalent means to communicate. Teachers also noted that immigrant students were attentive. Hassan's first teacher said, "The brand new student into the United States, is less likely to cause problems." Eman's first teacher asserted, "Students' performance and behavior depends on how recently they came and what the issues were." Ahmad's teacher explained the reason immigrant students tend to be more quiet is because, "they are learning a new language so unless they're speaking their native language to others who speak it a lot of times they're more quiet and they're less likely to act up." Teachers noted the serenity in students' behavior and appreciated it.

Nevertheless, with all the emphasis on language, teachers were not aware of the specific dialect that their students spoke at home. In all conversations with teachers, they seemed to recognize that students' native language was Arabic, yet they did not recognize the specific dialect students spoke. Hassan's first teacher said, "I know he speaks Arabic, I don't know what specifically- I know there is a dialect like if you speak Arabic in Iraq it is going to be different in other countries." Likewise, Manal's first teacher was familiar with the language her student spoke, "I believe Manal speaks Arabic. I asked her what language she spoke at home at one

time and I asked her if her parents spoke English, I think she said her father did but her mother didn't." Eman's second teacher affirmed that Eman's first language is Arabic. She knew that because, "I remember she told me she speaks French and that she went to a French school. She told me that last year." Eman's first teacher assumed that Eman spoke Arabic, but she was not sure, "I assume Arabic. It could be French. She did not tell me, but I am assuming." Again, some teachers did not recognize the dialects that students spoke, and they generally referred to students as Arabic speaking.

**Perceptions about students' extracurricular activities, hobbies, interests, and future plans.** Conversations with teachers revealed that most teachers were also unfamiliar with their students' lives outside the school. Teachers regarded extracurricular activities highly; they believed them to be of great importance in that they impacted the development of literacy of all students. Hassan's first teacher believed that extracurricular activities were important and that they help develop students' vocabulary. As he stated, "I think whether you do a sport or join drama or other clubs, it is gonna help them immensely at school because when doing extracurricular, you are learning non-academic words that are gonna help throughout life." Yet, while Hassan's teacher did not know if he had any extracurricular activities, he knew that Hassan liked animals and that he had two bunnies in which his teacher used in one of the class Jeopardy games to help Hassan understand the lesson. Hassan's second teacher also had a similar opinion about extracurricular activities. She said, "Extracurricular activities are very helpful to students since they are in a different setting, it's kid centered, the student who is learning English wants to fit in and since it is a fun-learning setting more than an academic setting the students can learn English better and get involved." Hassan's teachers seemed to believe that when students are involved in extracurricular activities learning happens naturally

within the context of sports and students use vocabulary freely. Manal's first teacher reiterated this by saying,

Extracurricular activities help a lot and are essential. When you make a close group of friends and when you have that support, you begin to get support for the academics.... It is a multi-facet thing, so she's learning some of the common English and she becomes familiar with some of the structure of how we do things in this country.

Eman's second teacher also noted that extracurricular activities help improve conversational English and other important skills for teenagers, "Just for any student, just being involved in extracurricular activities is good for them for learning time management and to balance different things, so it is always positive." Similarly, Ahmad's first teacher believed that sports were a great way to meet new people, "I think those are perfect ways for kids to get out and meet new people and just try something that is good or hard for them."

Nonetheless, with all the great emphasis placed on extracurricular activities and their benefits to students, teachers did not know if the students participated in any. Hassan's first teacher said, "I do not know if Hassan is part of any in-school activities. I haven't talked to him about it. I don't know if he participates in out-of-school activities or how he spends his free time." In fact, none of Hassan's teachers seemed to know whether he participated in any extracurricular activities. As his second teacher remarked, "About activities, I don't know if he's one of the kids that goes home or if he stays after school. We have a lot of kids that just leave school right away, and I never noticed him around after school." Eman's first teacher remarked that she knew Eman was part of cross country since they called her few times from class to join the team for a competition; however, the teacher did not know about Manal's life outside the school, "I never asked her...All that I know is that she's in cross country. I don't know about anything else...I don't know anything about her outside the school. She doesn't say or she might have said something, but it hadn't clicked." Similarly, Manal's second teacher

disclosed, “I am not aware if she participates in any other school activities. She did not mention any out of school activities to me, not that I know of. Sometimes other students do talk to me about what they do outside school, I mean it depends on who the student is.” In addition, Ahmad’s second teacher who coached football and track and remarked that extracurricular activities were a fantastic way to find oneself, said, “Ahmad is not part of school activities- not that I know of. As far as I can see personally, he just seems to come to school and he get his education and that’s it.”

Teachers displayed the same lack of knowledge when it came to students’ interests and future plans. Hassan’s English teacher explained the fact that she did not really know a lot about him since the writing assignments they do in class did not extend to personal experiences. She said,

“I cannot draw on Hassan’s experiences in class because we do not do a lot of writing that is personal, we do not do personal narratives in class. It is very academic, we do compare and contrast, we do persuasive writing. There is not any opportunity in class where we share personal experience.”

For Hassan’s second teacher, he was merely a student in class since she could not identify Hassan individually. In terms of future plans she indicated, “We never had those conversations. I don’t remember what he said about his college education and career.” The same teacher also indicated, “I haven’t talked to Hassan about where he wants to go to study. We don’t do this usually in 10th grade, in the ACT class.”

Similarly, Manal’s English teacher attributed her unfamiliarity with Manal’s interests and future plan to the fact that it was not part of the curriculum despite the fact that she acknowledged that it was important to know about students. She stated, “We haven’t written about personal things. We’re mostly focused about writing about what they’re reading in class

and things related to it..." Manal's second teacher seemed to be oblivious about her student's plans outside the classroom, as she explained,

About her plans, and college, or career, I haven't talked to her to know what kind of career she'll have or even a college choice...About extracurricular activities, I don't know if she finds it interesting or not...I know that in a lot of schools overseas this extracurricular activities does not exist.

In the same sense, Ahmad's first teacher also said, "I do not know about his hobbies or interests outside school, it's sad to say. With him not being here, and how not shy- how quiet he is, I haven't been really able to have a real conversation with him." However, during the home visit to Ahmad's house (observation, October 17, 2015), he was planning for a recital event with four hundred people present. Eman's first teacher felt that she did not know enough about her student's future plans, college or career plans. She said, "These are interesting things to find out though. I have to talk to her a little more." Similarly, Eman's second teacher noted: "I don't know what she's going to major in."

Teachers and students' responses complimented each other in that students realized that the assignments they did in class did not relate to them personally, but they merely followed up a structured curricula that focused on content rather than on individuality. However, when it came to interests and activities outside the school, teachers were not aware of what students did or how they spent their time outside the school. Only two teachers indicated some familiarity with two student participants outside the classroom, Ahmad and Hassan. This happened because the teachers were friendly and encouraged students to talk.

Teachers' perceptions revealed positive views and attitudes about immigrant students' languages. However, teachers were largely oblivious to anything that their students did outside the school such as students' countries of origin, parental support, and students' dialects.

Teachers were also mostly unaware of students' extracurricular activities, their hobbies, interests, and future plans.

### **Students' Identities**

The backgrounds of students, their unique experiences, and their home environments that revealed specific literacy practices gave rise to the three kinds of identities in students: positional, cultural, and social. The percentage of statements that student participants made in reference to positional, cultural, and social identity was 60% (n= 78), 22% (n= 28), and 18.46% (n= 24) respectively. This section discusses the kind of identity formations students had and how students' unique home literacy practices and backgrounds created different positional, cultural, and social identities in students.

**Positional Identity.** Positional identity refers to how individuals themselves, as well as others, attempt to position themselves within group and how others view them. Looking at the three forms of identity, it was clear that the most salient form of students' positional identity was how students positioned themselves among their peers at school followed by how students positioned their teachers, and finally how student participants thought that other students positioned them.

***How others positioned student participants.*** There were differences in how student participants perceived they were being positioned. Student participants revealed that their physical traits, accent, and/or how they conducted themselves made other students position them. Hassan stated that he was openly asked to "go back home" and was not part of the mainstream group at school. He further explained, "My friends at school do not invite me to go out, but even if they do, I would not go. There are a few friends that I hang out with after school." Additionally, Hassan mentioned that in school, other students recognized his affection

with pets, and they affiliated his name with his pets since he was obsessed with animals. Other students picked on him constantly calling him names and posting pictures of him on Snapchat. Hassan shared that, “There is a group of Arab-American students who snap pictures of everyone like someone with a bad haircut, they would snap it and send it to the group. They make fun of all new students.”

Throughout the interview, Hassan openly complained about being called a “boater” by other students on regular basis. Being a newcomer, he does not affiliate himself with the connotative meaning of the word “boater” or how other students perceived him. He explained,

Everyone gets an impression that I am new in the country, Arabic, came from a place with no TV or electricity. Boater means that I am a new comer. They think I just came from the desert, that I lived in a tent and have not seen a cell phone before and that I have not ridden a car before- that we ride animals in our home country. That’s why boater annoys me.

Hassan’s perception was that his classmates perceived him to be primitive and not part of their civilized world. As much as the term ‘boater’ bothered him, he said he could not complain to any teacher because, “If I tell the teacher about someone who calls me a boater, everyone at school will call me a snitch.” Thus Hassan bore the unsophisticated image cast upon him by other students, even though he saw himself as smart as and more knowledgeable than others.

Ahmad indicated that he was also referred to as a boater but he did not report it happening as constantly as Hassan. Ahmad shared that it did not bother him when other students called him that name since it did not affect his education, nor did it affect his life so he chose to ignore them. He added, “I don’t tell my teacher either because this is something that does not affect my education. It is just something stupid that doesn’t affect my life.” In spite of being called a boater, Ahmad indicated that he believed his classmates thought of him as a ‘good’ student since he always completed his homework, participated in class, and did not skip classes.

Manal also reported feeling like she was not part of the mainstream, that she was different. She said, “When they look at me, it’s like I am a weird person in the classroom- like specific students and, I don’t know- it’s how I feel. I don’t know if it’s like that or not, but that’s how I feel like I am a weird person.” Manal mentioned that some students stared at her silently while “some boys in the class make fun or tease you and do a joke about you.” With her quiet character as she described herself, “I am always quiet and that’s why they think I am a weird person,” Manal was not always invited to go places with her classmates; as she said, “Only a couple of friends invited me to go places with them but I did not go because actually there is no one to take me.” Manal saw herself different from other classmates and she felt that was why she was never part of the class atmosphere since her self-concept was that she saw herself “weird” and “different” too as she indicated, “I feel like if I join an activity or club at school that I am going to be different from everyone else.”

According to Eman, classmates and friends perceived her as a smart and successful student at school. They were aware that she was new in the country; therefore, they asked her if she needed help in her classes. She said, “Some of my classmates look at me as smart and they ask me how can you do it? Others ask me if I need help and they say if you need help, come and we’ll help you.” Eman shared that, “Students always compliment my accent and say you have a nice accent.” She also felt respected by her classmates, “No one bothers me. They all respect me. They listen to what I say in class always.”

Student participants affirmed that they did not identify with the way other students saw them. The three participants, Hassan, Ahmad, and Manal, felt like they were not part of the mainstream, and focused on instances of being called names by their peers. Eman, the active and outgoing student, felt that she was admired and esteemed.

*Students positioning themselves among others.* The four student participants wanted their peers to view them in a specific way, therefore they behaved and presented themselves in a certain way. By doing this, student participants positioned themselves among others.

Hassan did not like being called a “boater,” but he felt helpless due to his limited language. Hassan said, “As a new student in a class, you are new, you are not familiar with the environment, do not master the language, so you will not respond well to him- you have to think about the words you need to say. So it is better to ignore it and move on.” By choosing to ignore and move on, Hassan intentionally positioned himself as apart from other students. He did not retaliate because he felt he did not possess the means to do so, which in his case was the language. In this way, he let others choose a position for him and, to some degree, accepted it as the lesser of several evils.

Ahmad conveyed that he has set the tone for himself in school. He said that he did not let anyone “make fun of me.” Ahmad added, “I respect my classmates, therefore, they have to respect me. I am always calm. I am quiet. This is how my friends see me also. Most of the time I appear like this.” Unlike Hassan, Ahmad was not annoyed by other students calling him names. Ahmad’s attitude was different in that he did not let those comments bother him on the personal level as he explained, “but some students, especially like- I don’t wanna say racist- but they are like prejudiced, they call us boaters. I go like “Do you mean bilingual?” For Ahmad, the term ‘boater’ corresponded to linguistic abilities rather than a primitive style of life. Ahmad positioned students who call others boater as prejudiced and ignorant for not realizing assets that newcomers bring with them. Ahmad considered students who called him names a trivial matter that did not concern him since it does not affect his education, as he indicated, “Most of

the times I don't talk to them, I don't listen to them, I just ignore them, and go. It is just something stupid that doesn't affect my life."

Manal positioned herself away from others by focusing on her serene personality. She felt that she did not belong or that she was not part of the mainstream because of her different lifestyle. She explained, "In the ESL class, all of us were at the same level, similar to each other. In all my other classes, students were different, they lived their lives in a different way than you did." Manal also lacked self-confidence and she therefore avoided doing things that made her stand out in class. She shared, "I hate presenting- I just hate it, especially if it is in front of all the class. I just don't like it because I am scared, I feel that I was so bad and that everyone was laughing at me." Manal used her quietness to go unnoticed. She kept a low profile as she described, "Teachers give the opportunity for students to ask questions in class and talk but I do not. I am not that kind. I am just not used to it." She also did not join clubs after school. She knew she was going to be different from others, as she said, "I always ask my friend, Do you wanna join something with me like a club or something? But, I feel like if I join an activity or club at school that I am going to be different from everyone else, I will be like somebody who doesn't know anything, like I do not know what they do inside of it." Although she also perceived herself as different from other students, her personality- being quiet and less outgoing- also affected how she positioned herself

Eman realized her strengths, and positioned herself in relation to her accomplishments, as opposed to the points of view of others. She said, "Outside of school, I am good at running. I run with the varsity girls' team. Sometimes, I volunteer after school. I need those volunteering hours so that I can join NHS [National Honor Society]." She defined herself in terms of her strengths and wanted to be viewed in terms of her accomplishments and her activities.

The student participants positioned themselves differently among their peers and in school. While Hassan and Ahmad were both called derogatory names, Hassan allowed those students to position him, at least in their minds, as inferior. In contrast, Ahmad demanded respect by his classmates and expected it. Manal also felt that she did not fit in with her mainstream peers, but based this belief on a fear of what *could* happen if she got involved with them as opposed to actual experience. She also attributed some of her “otherness” to her own shy personality. Eman wanted to be part of the school culture, and did not seem to believe that anyone held negative perceptions of her.

***Students positioning teachers.*** Student participants positioned their teachers based on teachers’ attitudes, teachers’ behaviors in class, and teachers’ conversations with them. They regarded different teachers in different ways: supportive, motivating, caring, and student-centered.

All students shared positive perceptions about their teachers. Students mentioned that they felt most comfortable with teachers who respected them and recognized their culture. First, none of the students said that they disliked any of their teachers at school. On the contrary, they all said that teachers respected them and tried to help them succeed at school. Eman said, “My teachers treat me very well. They tell me to always ask whenever I need something.” Also, Manal noted, “My teachers are all good. They all respect me and are good to me.” Second, students identified more with the teachers that shared their cultural heritage including language. Hassan said, “My math teacher who is Arabic, she can help you in your language if you needed that.” Similarly, Manal said, “My teacher cares too. She is also Arabic, she is always after me telling me you can do it, you can get straight A’s.”

Students also revealed that they preferred teachers who were more social and those who acknowledged their backgrounds and listened to their stories. Manal said, “One teacher, Mr. Jones, is interested in Arabic, so he always asks me how to say this in my language...This makes me feel good. It makes me feel like something- when everybody wants to know our language and more about us.” Hassan said, “We had a jeopardy game today, so he included questions that I know and I like such as my pets and he added pictures of them.” Ahmad reiterated the same idea about his teacher using what he knew to teach him in class. Ahmad explained that his math teacher always tried to help when he did not understand and made him do better. Ahmad said, “She knows that I like soccer so she uses the soccer field and how far I can kick a ball to give me examples in geometry.”

Ahmad was more at the personal level with his favorite teacher. He favored the teacher that connected with him as an individual rather than having a formal student-teacher relationship. Ahmad stated, “I favor my biology teacher also, I feel like he loves me as a brother and not like a student only.” This also was a reason that made Ahmad open up for that particular teacher and talked to him about his hobbies and how he spent his time out of school.

However, Ahmad did not share his out of school activities with other teachers. He stated, “I don’t tell teachers because I don’t talk about myself in class. I don’t know why, but I don’t. It is not that I am shy: I stand in front of hundreds of people and sing, I got used to it.” It would only take a special kind of teacher that is willing to invest the time in knowing students and building a relationship especially with students like Ahmad, who needed to feel that the teacher cared about him genuinely and not formally.

In this section, it was clear that the responses of teachers and students revealed reciprocal respect and good relationships among both parties. Students respected all their

teachers in school, did not have negative remarks about them, and acknowledged the teachers' efforts in helping students succeed in school. Similarly, teachers respected their students, their heritage languages, and they treated them well in class.

At the same time, there were contrasts between students and teachers with students warming up to teachers who knew things about them. Students also warmed up to teachers who showed interest in knowing more about them. For example, Ahmad shared his interest outside the school with his teacher at the time he kept this hidden from other teachers. It seems that some teachers were more encouraging than others. Also, the case with Eman, who felt encouraged by history teacher since he displayed an artifact from her country in class. Manal also expressed that she felt closer to her teacher who always attempted to learn some expressions in Arabic. Hassan also warmed up to his history teacher who tapped onto his interests and used them in the sequence of the lesson.

These differences do not correspond to being high-achieving or low-achieving students rather than to students' positional identity that was created by teachers. Thus, it was evident that all students warmed up to teachers who showed interest in knowing more about them.

**Students' cultural identity.** Students' developed their cultural identities from their immediate environments which was their homes, communities, and the adults in their lives. In this section, it is important to relay students as well as parents' accounts for their cultural practices since students do not develop cultural practices alone, - in a void. They rather acquire them from their immediate environment which includes their families and surroundings. Students' cultural practices help develop students' cultural identities (Nieto, 2010 and Gomez-Estern and colleagues, 2010) Parents' perceptions in this area validate students' perceptions and revealed the overall culture of the house from which students' developed cultural identity.

Students' cultural identity was embodied in their accounts and their parents' conversations about their language, religion, family, and daily practices and celebrations. All students indicated that Arabic was the language they spoke at home. Hassan said that if his siblings spoke English at home "I yell at them to speak Arabic." Ahmad shared that he speaks Arabic with his friends at school because, "I feel more comfortable to speak to them in Arabic." Eman said, "At home I always speak Arabic. Sometimes I speak French with my sister because I still remember it." Thus language was an important aspect of students' lives. Manal used Arabic at home but she was the only one among all participants who conversed in English with her friends since "they all spoke another dialect and it is difficult to understand each other sometimes."

Similarly, parents indicated that the language they spoke with their children at home was Arabic. Hassan's mother specified,

At home we always speak Arabic all the time. I am aware that doing this might hinder my child's development of vocabulary like other kids who speak one language. My kids start to go school at a lower level from those who speak English all the time at home. However, I like that they are learning Arabic because if they learn it at a young age, it is easier than learning at an older age. We do this so that they learn Arabic and they don't lose the language forever.

For parents, Arabic tied the children to their origin and culture as Hassan's grandmother said, "If a child was born here, it is better to go to the home country in the summers so that the children learn their culture and Arabic language. It is important that a child knows another language." Similarly, Manal's mother indicated, "Arabic is important for us in the family that's why we went back home."

This emphasis on speaking Arabic for the sake of maintaining the language in order to transmit the culture developed students' cultural identity. All student participants, except Eman, revealed that their choice of friends was limited to students from Arabic background. Ahmad said, "Most of my friends were with me, we were in the same ESL class, the same level in English, we both understood each other and had the same life because we were both from different places and we both spoke Arabic." Manal also revealed, "My friends and I all of us do the same things so it is not weird for me to tell them I am fasting."

Religion was another part of the students' cultural identity. Eman's father believed in the importance of maintaining their religious culture because, "The Arabic culture represents traditions that are part of us and stay with us and this includes religion which always preaches love, friendliness with people and good manners." In Eman's house (observation, October 10, 2015), the Quran was placed prominently on one of the tables in the living room. Ahmad stated, "Some of the things from my culture that I value highly are my religion and language." Ahmad indicated that being a reciter of Islamic songs was part of his culture, "So, this is the thing I've been doing for more than 3 years. I started doing it in my home country. I do it in every event that happens." Ahmad's dad explained, "We celebrate our religious holidays together in a big feast at home with all the family and we visit each other." Similarly, Ahmad's mother stated, "Our traditions and culture is different from traditions in the United States such as staying in

touch with relatives and friends. This is an Islamic obligation. Also, celebrating holidays and going to the mosque every Friday to pray.” During a home visit (observation, October, 17, 2015), I noticed that one of the few things hanging on the walls was an Islamic rosary. Manal also indicated that religious holidays were of great value for her. She said, “Some of the values of my culture that I value are fasting for Ramadan. I always do that because we got used to it.” Manal’s mother also asserted, “Religion is very important to us.” In Manal’s house, the only display on the wall in the living room was a huge portrait of god’s name in Arabic, highlighting the importance of religion in their lives (observation, October, 4, 2015).

Family was another cultural aspect that students talked about. Hassan said, “I esteem my religion, my animals, and my family most of all in my life.” Hassan’s mother indicated that inside their house they lead a traditional Arabic way of life and that she “make[s] sure my children practice the Arabic habits and way of living like relations with parents, respect to elderly, raising them the way we were raised. I talk a lot about their home country.” Also, Manal’s mother remarked that the Arabic culture was reflected by the furniture around the house. She said “We are proud of our culture. The couches represent the Yemini culture.” During the home visit, they received me in the living room, where it had traditional low Yemini couches (observation, October 4, 2015). Manal’s father asserted, “I like to keep the Arabic culture but there are extremes of the culture which we try to avoid like a lot of things in terms of dressing” thus indicating that they pick and choose which cultural aspects of culture to adopt. However, he was clear that they “wanted the kids to learn Arabic and the culture.”

Just as culture was reflected in language, religion and family life, interviews indicated that culture was also embedded in the daily practices and beliefs of the families. Eman’s mother explained how her family’s daily activities reflected their culture. She said,

My traditions are reflected in our daily behaviors and habits of living. For example, my kids are not allowed to have a sleep over except if it were at their relatives' house. This is a big No, No. I would never let them sleep outside the house first because they're girls (but even if I had boys, I would still not allow it- I don't like sleep overs) and second I don't allow it not even for one time because they will get used to that and start nagging every time. I only allow them to sleep at my mother's house as a reward for them but not even all the time.

Cultural practices such as sleep-over and good friends came up in every conversation with the parents and students. Manal said that her father not only forbade her from sleeping at friends' houses, but that he would not allow her to visit someone the family did not know. She said, "It's not just sleeping at a friend's house only that he is against, it is if my dad does not know my friend and her parents, I cannot talk to her and that annoys me a lot." Manal's mother explained that sleep over was forbidden since other families had boys, "Sleep over is not allowed except at their grandparents' house. I am concerned about my kids' and that's why sleep over is not allowed." The same idea was expressed by Eman as she said that even though her dad allowed her to go out with friends, they had strict rules. Eman explained, "I am allowed to visit a friend's house but I cannot sleep there and also my parents need to know her mom and to have spoken to her before or I am not allowed to go there to visit." Eman's father expressed the same idea about friends, "Eman can go study with her friends- not all friends- only those that we know and we trust, and they should also be doing well at school." Similarly, her mother said, "I would always allow them to go to school events, even with their friends, as long as I know the friends and know they are good company. If they are not good friends, I ask my kids to stay away from them." Ahmad's mother indicated that she felt the teenage years were critical, and thus continuously talked to her son and advised him about his friends, "I take care that my child's friends are good and polite kids or else I would not allow him to be around those friends."

Since parents believed that children were influenced by their peers, parents cared about the company their children had. Eman's mother explained that she encouraged friendship while abiding by their culture and traditions. She explained, "I care that the friends are polite, a little reserved as we have in our culture, that's why to go out with boys alone is not allowed." Similarly, Eman's father explained that he constantly reminded his children to keep good company, and avoid "friends that smoke, do drugs, or are disrespectful towards parents and others- stay away from those because they can impact their future and reputation."

Although each family limited their children's with friends, they put a great deal of emphasis on the importance of spending time with family. Hassan's grandmother believed that when people live alone, they become stiff and that relatives make you feel related and part of the group. She explained,

My extended family plays an important role in the life of my kids. They are important because they keep the family traditions and culture, the passion among family members, the feeling that there is someone related to us that cares about us and we care about them, we respect them, stay in touch, go visit during the holidays.

Eman's mother explained, "We have a big extended family and we meet them during holidays and in celebrations also when someone gets sick." Hassan explained that part of the family's cultural practices was to get together with everyone at the grandmother's house for birthdays and Eid (Islamic holiday), "In Michigan we all get together at my grandmother's house for every birthday. On Eid too, we go to my grandmother and she makes a big meal and give the kids money, and have a barbeque." Hassan's mother indicated that they celebrated all holidays and not only Islamic ones, "We always celebrate our holidays and every other holiday whether religious or American like Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving, anything." Eman also said that her family always visited her grandmother over the weekend. She also indicated that they celebrated "Ramadan, and Hajj Eid. We go to my mother's house where we all sit together

and talk with each other and eat a feast.” Eman’s Father asserted that celebrations bring families together, “We honor celebrations which bring all the family members together and keep them close together so that they keep helping and supporting each other. We celebrate all the holidays which bring us closer from friends and family.”

From the perceptions of parents and students, one can easily notice the cultural practices of the families and how those practices influenced the formation of the cultural identity of students. Culture impacted students’ concepts of right and wrong, social activities, sports, and other gender issues which again impacted the formation of students’ cultural identities. For example, Manal said,

I cannot participate in some of the activities like football, once my sister asked him (my father) if she can join football and he said no, because girls, you know, are not pushy or something. There are certain things that girls cannot really do because of how they are built, so playing football is a rough activity for them.

Also, as Ahmad was speaking about his friends, he indicated, “I mostly hang out with Arabic friends. Mostly they are boys because in my home country I never had a girlfriend- you know a friend that is a girl.”

Again, this differentiation between certain sports and kinds of friends had roots in cultures of students which formed their cultural identities. Also, one can notice that some parents were more reserved than others in the way they raised their children and allowed social engagements or not such as sleep over, a behavior that is very common in other cultures. For example, Eman’s family was less reserved when it came for sports. Nonetheless, Eman’s mother indicated that they were still conservative when it comes to mixing up. She said, “It is important to attend events and dances at school to know the culture of the school because my kids are living here now. However, they cannot go as boyfriend-girlfriend except with a group of friends.”

Hence, language, religion, family, traditions, and celebrations helped form the cultural identity of students. Again, in this case, there were no difference among the student participants that pertained to high or low achievers. However, there were slight differences that existed in families' cultural practices in their level of being conservative that pertained to the country of origin of the participants.

**Social identity.** Social identity consists of the unique personality that individuals develop due to interactions with family members along with community people that give meaning to their experiences by supporting and mentoring them. In this study, all participants maintained close relations with their family members and especially the extended family. Hassan's mom stated, "My child is attached to his relatives. He has a great relationship with his uncle and they always go places together." Hassan's grandmother indicated that family ties are important despite the vast distances that separate family members. She added, "That's why we keep going back to Lebanon so that our children stay connected to their culture and traditions, they get to know their aunts and cousins." Similarly, Ahmad's family maintained relations with their relatives outside the United States. Ahmad's mother indicated, "We have relatives in Canada, we also go stay with them for some time." Even though Eman's relatives do not live in the same city, the families get together for every occasion and for holidays as indicated by her mother, "But we do get together on holidays and celebrations. They chat with the kids and ask them how their school is going." Eman's father also said, "My brother-in-law lives in Ohio, so we always go visit him and go to places there such as amusement parks." Manal's mother mentioned that they live in a joint family, three different families dwell in the same house. Her mother explained, "One of my in-law's son has been with us for few months since they came from Yemen and until they find a house. The others along with their wives and babies have been here for 2 years."

So, spending time with extended family members was an important marker in the social identity of students. All participants indicated that they had strong ties with their extended families. Hassan's grandmother said, "My extended family members keep the passion among family members, the feeling that there is someone related to us that cares about us and we care about them, we respect them, stay in touch, go visit during the holidays." Similarly, Ahmad's father assigned one day where everybody should be present at his house. As he explained it, "Also, other than holidays, there is one day of the week, which is Saturday, where all the family must get together no matter what they're doing and we have dinner all together." These family relations tied students to a bigger circle outside their nuclear family which helped develop their social identity.

At the same time, social relation with extended families played a role in students' school achievement. Members of the extended families impacted students' academic achievement. Eman's mother explained,

Cousins and relatives affect the academic achievement of students because they encourage each other to do better at school. At the same time feeling jealous plays a role in their academic achievement since they think that my cousin is doing well at school and I want to be like him. When they get together they talk about what they're doing at school.

Similarly, Hassan's mother reflected, "All his cousins are educated and they play a role model in his life. All my family members have Masters Degrees and that sets the standards for my child to achieve higher in order to be like them." Manal's relatives were not successful at school, but this provided Manal and her siblings with a concrete example of what not to do. Manal's father explained, "My kids are more towards education, their cousins are towards doing other things- education is the last thing they think about. So the cousins they grew up with now are drop out of school whereas my kids are still in school,"

On the other hand, conversations with students revealed something important about their social identity. Except for Eman, students did not have many friends at school, and did not participate in social outings or school dances with friends. Hassan, for example, was very reluctant to go out with friends, “My friends at school do not invite me to go out, but even if they do, I would not go. There are a few friends that I hang out with.” Manal also indicated, “Only a couple of friends invited me to go places with them but I did not go because actually there is no one to take me.” Hassan seemed careful in picking his friends and he wanted friends that could challenge him “to do better at school and expand my thinking.” He did not want any friends that “talk too much nonsense, and are not faithful to friends.” Hassan said, “I like them because we clicked together. Like my friend, Ali, he knows a lot of information in religion, in life, in everything.” However, Hassan did not “hang out”, even with those friends. He explained, “My friends used to invite me out but I would always refuse,” even though his mother encouraged him to spend time with friends. Hassan’s mother shared, “I encourage him to attend the school dance but he doesn’t go. I always ask him what is going on at school, but he does not like to participate.”

Friends and friendship were very important for Ahmad. Ahmad said, “I mostly hang out with Arabic friends. Mostly they are boys because in my home country I never had a girlfriend- you know a friend that is a girl.” Ahmad thought that friends were like second brothers and that, “A person who does not have friends, there is no need for him in life. Friends advise me and most of them would show me the right way for things related to school and things outside of school.” Likewise, Ahmad’s father indicated that, “My child likes to be around friends that are motivated and want to achieve higher at school.” However, like Hassan, Ahmad reported that there were some school social activities in which he did not participate. He said,

I do not go to school dances because of my religion because the way I see things, from the things that I read, and from my role model, they contradict with school dances. In addition to the fact that I do not like music and dancing.

Manal picked her friends by talking to them first and making sure their interests match hers.

She said,

I know if we match or not. Sometimes I talk to somebody, and they are way different, they are not like me. They are not the type I understand or anything, they are just different, like the way we talk or the topics we both discuss.

Despite having friends, Manal was not allowed to participate in social events without a parent.

Her mother indicated, “Sometimes the kids go to weddings or birthdays but I must be with them- they do not go by themselves at all.” Eman could not visit her friends’ houses, because there was no one to give her a ride there, and, also because her dad would not allow her. Manal expressed her frustration by saying, “I don’t understand why he [father] wouldn’t let me go to their house, especially if they don’t have boys at their house, then why not?!”

Eman was the exception in this respect and was more outgoing when it came to friends. As she indicated, “My friends invite me to go out with them. We go to ‘Sweet Cravings’, I go to their houses also or we go to a restaurant.” Unlike Manal’s parents who never let her go alone with friends, Eman’s parents were less restrictive when it came to going out with friends and visiting their houses. Friends were important for Eman for reasons similar to those of the other students. As she explained it, “My friends influence me positively, they push me to do well in school especially when we meet together in the library.” She also indicated that her friends must have similar social and cultural attributes to her, noting, “My friends also- their parents taught them the same things that I learned from my parents.”

In conclusion, students had strong relations with both immediate family members and members of the extended family. Extended family members played a significant role in shaping

students' identity beyond the role of nuclear family. Friends were also an important part of the student participants' social identities. Common trends across students included that they were careful in choosing their friends and that their parents were always aware of with whom their children were mingling.

### **Summary**

In this section, interviews with students and parents shed light on home literacy routines that the Arab immigrant families practice. Themes such as family and friends' support, along with background and experiences were dominant themes. Students took part in an array of functional literacy activities outside the school. Similarly, interviews with teachers revealed that teachers realized the great value Arab families place on education along with the high expectations they have for their children. However, teachers were unaware of the specific kinds of support students had at home and they did not establish communication with parents.

In addition, examining the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers, regarding students' literacy practices helped uncover some of the factors that influenced the identities that students projected in school. As a manifestation of their home environments and unique backgrounds, students exercised positional identity in three ways: how others positioned them, how they positioned themselves among other students, and how they positioned their teachers. These positional identities played both negative and positive roles in the lives of students. In addition to positional identities, students' unique home literacy practices helped reveal their cultural and social identities.

## CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of the research study was to investigate the perceptions of Arab immigrant students, their parents, and teachers concerning their home literacy practices. The study also shed light on how students' home literacy practices and backgrounds influenced the formation of the positional, cultural, and social identities of students.

The research study adds to the field by giving insight on the culturally-specific home literacy practices of Arab families from the viewpoints of varied stake holders: Arab immigrant students, their parents, and teachers. This is accomplished through interviews and observations that produced evidence of the culturally-embedded literacy practices of Arab immigrant students, their wealth of knowledge and experiences. By looking at the literacy practices of these Arab families, the study expands the knowledge about the range of literacy and cultural practices that might occur in students' home domains. In addition, since the study examines the same issue from three different perspectives, it allows us to see where there are differences and similarities in perceptions that may affect learning.

As discussed in chapter four, the student, parent, and teacher participants had their own perceptions about home literacy practices and students' backgrounds. Sometimes, their perceptions varied and sometimes they were similar. The following is a discussion of the results of this study. Below, I present three themes and the students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of them. The themes presented represent trends in the data across participants, although, of course, there are differences in the degree to which each participant's responses fit with each theme. Both trends and discrepancies are noted.

### **Demonstrating the Value of Education**

A key finding in the perceptions of Arab immigrant families was that all students and parents valued education. From the perceptions of parents in this study, one cannot help but notice the great emphasis that parents placed on education. For immigrant families, education was of high value that preceded other basic needs in life. It was also one of the reasons they left their countries and came to the United States. Thus all family members anticipated a great future with a high college degree for their children. Heath (1983, 2012) explained how social and cultural values of the home impact the literacy of children and affect their academic performance. Thus, these high expectations on the behalf of parents likely influenced students' high expectations of themselves.

One way in which students' appreciation of education was evident was in the methods that some of them built and utilized support networks to develop literacy outside of school. Three out of four children relied on friends to help them acquire English and study outside school when parents themselves were not able to provide academic support for their children. Additionally, siblings in the family supported the students in doing school work. Particularly when language barriers or work obligations precluded the adults in their families from helping with school work, these students relied on a carefully cultivated group of others. This is similar to what students in Cieslinki's (2007) and Rodriguz's (2006) studies, who solicited help from older siblings and relatives when immigrant parents could not provide help with homework.

Nonetheless, even though not all parents could help children with school work at all times, they were often able to provide other kinds of support that promoted literacy development. Parents provided children with multiple important conditions to achieve well at school. First, the parents mentioned a supportive, quiet home environment as conducive to learning. Second,

parents motivated their children, and second, parents motivated their children to achieve higher by instilling the value of education in them, having high expectations for their children, and monitoring their grades and school achievement. Parents also drew students' attention to positive, well-educated role models in their lives.

These home conditions were important because they supported learning and complemented the vision of school in promoting successful students. This is not unlike the findings of Solomon (2003), who concluded that the home had strong influence on the development of science literacy in children and affirmed that homes could be a special place, rich in supportive resources that could help bridge the differences between the school and home cultures. However, while teachers in Solomon's study intentionally involved the families of immigrant students with science projects, in my study, homework assignments were self-contained within the classroom and did not involve parents, and rarely included overt reference to students' lives outside of the classroom.

There were only two instances in this study where a student participant, Eman, drew on her background to complete a homework assignment. Eman's English teacher assigned an "I believe" essay, through which she discovered pertinent background information such as Eman's French and Arabic skills and also learned how Eman's parents placed high value on education. Therefore, she was able to build on that capital to help Eman in class, something which both mentioned in their interviews.

Another documented instance that helped bridge the culture of school and home to advance learning and create connection between a student and his teacher occurred in Ahmad's science class. At a cultural event hosted by the ESL Department at school, Ahmad presented a poster about his culture and background. His science teacher attended the event, and indicated

that he was able to build on this capital and use the information he learned about Ahmad to motivate him in class and form a personal connection with Ahmad where Ahmad opened up to him and he started telling him about what he does outside school which included his recitations.,

The value of education, along with high expectations, were transferred from parents to children. This was realized by the three groups of participants: students, parents, and teachers. First, parents discussed thoroughly how their perceptions about education were interconnected and built on each other. Parents' ideas encompassed the high value placed on education, which paved the way to create high expectations for their children, which the parents believed in turn made children accept the responsibility and become independent learners. Students' perceptions mirrored their parents' in that they realized those expectations, and thus they were motivated to become high achievers yearning to attain college degrees. While the students reported learning both independently and collaboratively, even their collaborative learning was somewhat independent in that they initiated and conducted their own study session. Additionally, all children, high and low achievers, recognized the support their parents provided them with in creating environments conducive to learning. These environments were characterized by uninterrupted study time, limited TV, and less responsibilities at home. All children acknowledged that what mattered most to their parents was that they attained high education. Moll and colleagues (1998) identified similar resources available in the homes of Mexican children that consisted of a strong fostering philosophy of child rearing that is highly supportive of education and which includes learning English, high expectations for a university-level education, and strong values of respect for others. Similarly, Li (2008) explained that parents' cultural beliefs influenced the literacy practices of the immigrant families and that every single family expected one of the children to become a doctor so the families invested in their children.

However, in all three studies, it is not clear whether this type of capital is recognized and leveraged by school systems.

The teachers in this study also recognized the supportive nature of the families, but in a much broader sense. Teacher assumed that the zeal that students had for education must have been supported in some way at home. They assumed that the families had educational expectations for their children, and some teachers indicated that those expectations might be a common value for all immigrant families. While they recognized, generally, that families must be supportive of their children's education, they were not aware of particular supports, and thus unable to take advantage of them to further students' learning.

### **Perceptions of Academic and Linguistic Skills and Knowledge**

The perspectives family members and their children revealed regarding their academic and linguistic skills and knowledge were different than those of the teachers. All parents and children reported that their schooling in their home countries was more rigorous, and thus they were ahead in content knowledge. Most parents and children also spoke in ways that indicated the children's literacy and language learning achievement. Teachers, however, did not recognize that knowledge. Some teachers believed that students were at a disadvantage since students were limited by the language factor.

Even with their limited experience with the American education system, through their children, parents were able to draw comparisons among the American system and education in their home countries. Those comparisons were important because they helped parents realize the differences and build on the assets their children brought with them. Park (2013) discussed the importance of a dual frame of reference which immigrants possess which helps them understand the contradictions and challenges between the two worlds and find ways for self-expression.

Despite the solid foundation that the educational system in their home countries provided the children with, parents reported that it was rigid and pressured students with a lot of work, not all of which the parents viewed as necessary or valuable. Parents were happy that the American education addressed only relevant topics to children, which placed less of a demand on their time. Thus, although parents were grateful that their children's previous schooling had positioned them (in the parents' view) as ahead academically, they were also pleased that the students were under less pressure in their new settings. This finding contradicted what Li (2008) presented in her research about immigrant Chinese families, in which the families believed that American schools failed to promote the value of education in students since they viewed it to be less rigorous. The difference between cultures serves to highlight the influence of culture on different immigrant groups' perceptions of the American educational system.

In their interviews, teachers did not mention the strengths that students and parents talked about. Many teachers thought that students were behind, perhaps confusing the students' abilities to effectively convey knowledge with whether they possessed it. Park (2013) and Danzak (2011) emphasized that immigrant students can use their background knowledge to become successful in school, something that these educators did not report taking advantage of, for the most part. One exception was Ahmad's math and biology teachers. Ahmad's math teacher based math instruction on his favorite sports, soccer, in order to make content comprehensible to him. Similarly, Ahmad's science teacher took every opportunity to use what he learned about him in the ESL cultural event to explain science concepts since the teacher understood the region Ahmad lived in.

Although not specific to his home culture, the teacher did connect to Ahmad's interests outside of school, which Ahmad felt helped him achieve better in math. Kelly's (2012) study of

how students who were limited in English and enrolled in a self-contained ESL classroom, showed teachers- could tap into students' cultural knowledge and out-of-school practices to contribute to and enrich school projects. Although each of the students in this study possesses some of capital which could have been used to advance the student in school. It went largely unrecognized.

Student participants revealed that they had made fast progress in language through their first year in school in the United States, however their teachers' perceptions of their language learning were different. Teachers were not looking at progress, but rather were focused on proficiency. Most teachers described students as doing well in their classes –with respect to their language abilities. All teachers realized that students have improved in English from when they started the year before, but that their language failed them and they were not able to compete with high-achieving, mainstream students. Therefore, there was a discrepancy in that teachers did not view that all students did well in language because they were measuring against a benchmark of academic proficiency. However, students and their parents had relatively positive perceptions of language learning, as their measure was progress.

Teachers did not attribute students' lack of progress to their heritage language. In fact, teachers valued students' heritage language. Nieto (2010) talked about how some educators use a deficiency lens when they adopt a culture of schooling which tends to devalue the heritage language. Nieto believes that such an attitude communicates a feeling of inadequacy and deficiency to students since there is only one measurement for success: reading and writing in English. That was completely not the case here. In the study, teachers thought it was great that students knew another language and that it would help them in the long run. Also, teachers estimated the role of the native language in helping students, so they did not prevent students

from speaking it in class or with friends. Some teachers made effort to learn some of the Arabic words to connect with students. However, while teachers valued the heritage language of students in the abstract, they did not necessarily embody that value in their teaching likely because valuing it in general is not the same as knowing enough about the heritage language and culture to integrate it into teaching in meaningful ways.

There was an array of activities that students participated in outside of school, such as volunteering, actively participating in community events, surfing the internet, reading about a topic of interest for them, and teaching siblings for example. Those were referred to in chapter four as functional literacy activities, however, interestingly, most were not highly valued as literacy activities by any of the three groups. Students' functional literacy practices enhanced their knowledge and experiences in different life domains and developed their languages, English and Arabic. Even though the functional literacy practices could not be directly connected to academic literacy practices, they likely indirectly enhanced students' learning, contributed to their general knowledge, contributed to language acquisition, and shaped their personalities. Moll and Reyes (2008) refer to this kind of literacy as a "constellation of social activities" that aid students' literacy. The opportunity to participate in these literacy events provided children with different linguistic spaces, which can aid literacy development. This kind of functional literacy was not recognized by the current school system that focused only on formal reading and writing. The functional activities that students engaged in built students' language, so they felt they were progressing; but because they did not measurably build academic language, the teachers did not see the gains in proficiency. Although their overall language and literacy may have improved, it was the social language, not the academic language, and thus invisible in school. Thus, while parents and students, who witnessed students' out-of-school literacy

practices, recognized progress in English literacy; teachers, who, for the most part, only saw students in school, perceived language through a deficit lens, perhaps because much of students' language growth did not improve their academic English proficiency.

It must be noted here that when I planned this research, I wanted to make sure that the participants included two high-achieving and two low-achieving students. I came in with the assumption that the high-achieving students must have more literacy practices outside the school. What the research revealed was that the lives of the low-achieving students were full of literacy practices; however, those practices were not recognized by the school. The environment of the two low-achieving students was characterized by activities that fall under functional literacy practices which develop students' literacies but which schools miss to recognize. Hassan, for example, was an avid reader and was interested in any topic about animals and politics. Similarly, Ahmad was a reader of poetry in Arabic and an active member in his community. Just because their grades were not good at school, that was not an indication for the absence of literacy activities outside the school. In fact, data revealed that there was no difference among the high-achieving and low-achieving students in terms of the literacies practiced outside school.

### **Two Detached Worlds**

In her study of Latino families in American classrooms, Honeyford (2010) found that when teachers recognized and invited students' cultural identities into the classroom, students' writing samples included representations of larger networks of people, activities, and things. Students would extend their writings to include the past, present and future along with an appreciation and pride for their community, families, and themselves. This made learning part of who the students were and helped teachers and students build better relationships that promoted success and achievement. Cordova and Matthiesen (2008) discussed the power of

teacher talk to help support the development of literacy in students' inside and outside of school. Cordova and Matthiesen argue that teachers could prove to value students' lived experiences and use them as resources for learning. While teacher participants identified the important role that parents played in the lives of children and which was evident in students' motivation and success, teachers lacked knowledge about the home environment, parents, and background information related to their students.

As discussed before, teachers recognized, through students' attitudes, the value that Arab immigrant families placed on education. All teachers noticed that students were diligent, focused, and determined in their work. Teachers also described students as well-behaved, respectful, serious, and open to help. Teachers positioned the students based on behaviors related to classroom management; good students were quiet and well-behaved, regardless of academic achievement. As two of the teacher participants said, they did not need to talk to the parents because the student had never been in trouble. In other words, as long as the student was not disruptive, everything must be going well and the teacher would not tweak the instruction or initiate family communication. Parents were similarly focused on behavior. When making decisions about socialization, even for academic reasons such as studying, they based their decisions on standards for behavior. Socializing outside of family and religious events, particularly without *family* supervision, was just not in their schema of what "good" children did, and thus not a stepping stone on their roads to academic success. The children rose up to their teachers' expectations in that they did not get in trouble at school, no one received any office referrals, and their teachers awarded them tokens for good behavior. They also were careful in choosing their friends in order to communicate their parents' expectations.

In addition, the study revealed that teachers did not, in most cases, know the countries of origin or dialects of Arabic spoken by students- both things that shaped students' cultural identities. In their studies of African-American adolescents, Collins (2004) and Sutherland (2005) found that students tended to be more involved at school and their learning is maximized when teachers acknowledge and tap into students' ideologies, principles, values, practices, and beliefs, which are indicative of students' cultural and social identities. In this study, most teachers conceived of all students as Arabic, which was correct, but also incomplete. Compton-Lilly (2008) discussed that educators must discover and utilize students' identities and cultural practices to help students develop literacy. Though two teachers were able to give a country of origin a student, they indicated that they were only assuming and that they associated the students with previous ones they had in class. At least one student recognized this lack of knowledge and tried to inform his teachers. Ahmad also explained that he tried to clarify to his teacher that he said his name in a Lebanese way as well as other differences between Lebanese and Iraqi cultures in food, traditions, and attire. However, the other students and teachers made no mention of addressing the topic of country of origin or dialect. This lack of awareness of students' cultures and backgrounds cannot be entirely the teacher's responsibility. It also falls back on students and their parents to engage in the school culture and encourage their children to connect with their teachers and get to know them better. This also might fall under the activities and events that the administration at school can help facilitate to help students and teachers connect.

One of the teachers in the study stood out as an exception and seemed more familiar with one student participant. This was because that student participant had shared pictures, interests and other things with the teacher on his own initiative. This interaction between Hassan and his teacher prompted the teacher to use the cultural knowledge he gained from Hassan to engage

him. This encounter paved the way to a better understanding on both sides which resulted in the teacher utilizing that information in class to help that student succeed. Moll and colleagues (1998) refer to “funds of knowledge” present in Latino homes and how teachers’ authentic knowledge of their students’ world outside the context of school helped them aid their students’ academic achievement. Cabrero (2011) also indicated that teachers can draw on the students’ linguistic and cultural experiences to help them develop their literacy. However, this strength went unnoticed by most teacher participants in this study. When asked whether they would tap into students’ knowledge and experiences, all except one teacher lamented that the assignments do not permit that, and thus personal information simply did not make its way into the classroom for any of their students. In the case of the immigrant students, most teachers did not know what non-English languages and dialects the students spoke and, they were generally unfamiliar with the students’ background knowledge.

Finally, there was a good deal of disagreement surrounding extra-curricular activities. Teachers acknowledged the significance of extracurricular activities and sports at school in improving the social and language skills of students, but some of them were unaware if students were part of any of these activities or encouraged them to join. Eman and Hassan’s parents encouraged them to do sports. Unlike Manal who did not have a ride, Eman’s parents would not hesitate to drive her to sports events. Hassan’s parents also encouraged him to be part of the school culture, but he declined. However, Manal and Ahmad’s parents did not seem to encourage them to participate in activities at school, despite the fact that Ahmad was part of a soccer team outside the school. With the exception of Eman, the students seemed to be caught between two value systems and forced to make a choice. Manal and Ahmad chose their home culture and values. By taking such a choice, they were positioning themselves outside the social norms of

the school. Hassan was also not part of the school's fabric, but in his case, it was rather a personal choice not enforced by family ideologies.

### **Students' Identities**

Three different types of student identities were formed by the home environments and cultural experiences that students were exposed to in and outside school.

**Positional identity.** Students' own perceptions of their backgrounds as different from those of many of their classmates influenced how they thought other classmates saw them. In their work, Romo and Falbo (1996) drew attention to the dominance of the white American culture at school and indicated that some minority groups did not fit into a peer group due to their cultural heritage. In this study, there were some examples of classmates positioning the students as outsiders, such as when two of the students were called "boaters". In addition, the way one dressed and whether one wore a headscarf, were important considerations in why Manal thought she was different and perceived herself as an outsider.

However, not all participants perceived themselves to be devalued based on cultural differences. Within this group, as in the general high school population, some of these kids felt a part of the group at least part of the time (e.g., Eman). Eman, who was the most socially comfortable, also spoke with a French accent, which is often esteemed (Nieto, 2010) and also was encouraged by her family to engage in social activities outside of school, which alleviated the tension between the home and school environments. While others felt excluded, Eman's French accent, along with her high level of social engagement may have made Eman more popular and at ease with her identity in spite of her immigrant and language status.

Students also exercised their positional identity among others. McCarthey and Moje (2002) emphasize that individuals' physical traits in everyday interactions affects how students

position themselves and are being positioned by others. In this study, students were positioned differently depending on traits they displayed. Ahmad perceived himself as respected because of his serious attitude, and because he respected others. Eman believed she was admired since she was successful and active during school and after school.

Students also positioned themselves as away from other students through their own actions: Ahmad and Manal remained reserved and quiet in class and did not participate unless being called upon. What was remarkable about those two students is that their personalities out of school were totally opposite of what they revealed in class. Ahmad and Manal were very outgoing, assertive, and social in their home lives. One teacher was able to figure out Ahmad's real self as he interacted with him outside the classroom in a cultural event. This encounter had a positive effect on Ahmad: he related the teacher as a "brother" (meaning they befriended each other) and thus opened up to him, and the teacher tapped into his knowledge of Ahmad's culture to help him succeed in class. Rodriguz (2006) drew attention to how schools depicted one kind of identity of students that was totally different from the students' conventional identities at home. Rodriguz explained that discourses at school positioned students in limiting and negative ways that focused only on the progress students made toward acquiring English. When teachers focus on one side of the student, it becomes difficult to discover the true nature of students. Sometimes teachers' expectations and attitudes set the kind of personality a student projects in class. Coming from a rigid school system, along with the nature of classes and seriousness of instruction, are all factors in how students present themselves in school as opposed to how they might be outside.

Another aspect of students' positional identities that was revealed in this study is that students identified with teachers that shared their culture and/or language and were more open

to them. For example, two student participants, Hassan and Manal, referred multiple times to the fact that one of their (distinct) teachers was Arabic. Even though one student did not speak Arabic with her at all, both students reported that they were comfortable and academically confident to be with those teachers. Teachers' sharing a language with students has important implications. Garcia (1992) draws attention to the importance of communicative competence, a concept that encompasses culture and language at the same time. Garcia explains that students tend to be more successful when they share the communicative competence with their teachers. Garcia's study shows that language extends beyond linguistics to include sociocultural aspects that influence communication. So, even though one of the students never conversed with this teacher in Arabic, he was reassured to be in her class just because she was Arabic.

**Cultural identity.** Students' native language and emphasis on maintaining their heritage language was an important part of their cultural identities. Honeyford (2010) indicated that students' cultural identities are evident in students' choice of language, keeping up their traditions, practicing their religions, and through their daily practices. In this study, native language was sacred to all the participants and their parents since it connected them to their culture.

Another part of their cultural identities was the importance of regularly connecting with their families, both immediate and extended. Students often traveled back to their home countries in the summer to meet and spend time with extended family. Participants kept family ties and maintained celebrations and family visits as a way of support and protecting their cultural values. Families also influenced children and motivated them at school. They also served as role models for them. This was in keeping with Moll and Reyes (2008) who highlighted the great role of

parents, caretakers, and the surrounding family members of Mexican families in shaping children's education and providing them with unique experiences.

**Social identity.** The home environment and culture of families also helped create student participants' social identities. Li (2007) stressed that parental human capital is central for students' success at school and considered a form of identity that is rich with resources that can help students succeed. In the participants' families, parents were invested in their children's education. They supported them, secured a good environment for them to learn at home, motivated them, and had high expectations for their children. With the high importance that participants gave to families, students were at a disadvantage when their teachers lacked information about this central part of students' lives outside the school. In this study, a large part of the social identities of students consisted of their immediate families and extended family members- inside and outside the United States. Coleman (1998) described the collectivity in the relationships among members of extended families as enriching and referred to them as social capital. Heath (2012) described those human resources as "intimate strangers" that included people like coach, choir, and community members that children interact with and which can help stretch students' languages, values and interests. Social capital was abundant in the homes of student participants in this study. This social capital took the form of close relationships among student participants and their aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and people in their community which Katz (1991) referred to a "cadre of social agents" that formed students' social identity.

Besides family relationships, another important aspect of the social identity of students was friends. Friends were not random in students' lives. Participants indicated that they were selective in choosing their friends. They mostly welcomed friends that were a good influence on them, matched the students' personality, and challenged them intellectually. That is perhaps why,

with the exception of Eman, participants were not particularly outgoing and did not have many friends. Rather, Ahmad and Manal had a small, close circle of friends; while Hassan associated mostly with family members.

### **Culture, Microculture, and Subculture**

Culture is what gives groups of people unique qualities such as language, customs, ways of being, believing, traditions, and behaving. In chapter two, I held forth that microculture represents the slight variations among groups such as dialect, social class, attire, and forms of celebrations which distinguish groups yet maintain them under the same umbrella of culture. Similarly, a subculture is another division of a culture that encloses the invisible aspects of the culture and which requires special inside knowledge to be detected. Examining the culture at its deep levels, allows us to look at the cultural practices of students beyond the surface level and sheds light on the concealed culturally specific literacy behaviors of students and their families.

In this study, the influence of culture was evident in students' languages, dialects, celebrations, food, and habits of behavior such as respect to the elderly and teachers. As microculture was not as easily detected as culture, it was also noticed in the differences in the different countries of origin of students. For example, even though all students were Arabic in origin, they all came from three different countries: Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. This also resulted in different dialects students had, families' social class, and attire. Manal, the Yemeni student, typically resorted to speaking in English with other Arabic students in school since others could not understand her dialect easily. By observing their home environments, it was evident that Hassan and Eman came from middle class families. This was evident in the level of education of parents and the setting of their houses which reflected style and modernity (observation, Oct. 10, 2015 and November 10, 2015). Ahmad came from a working-class family with a low

education level and this was also reflected in his house setting which was modest and simple. Even though Manal's father was a medical doctor, Manal's mother did not have a high school degree and she was in charge of the house. Style and furniture in the house might be expensive, but it was not consistent throughout the house. An observer could easily contrast Manal's house with Hassan and Eman's houses which both had a variety of paintings hanging on the walls, coordination in furniture, and a display of cultural artifacts were all over the rooms. In contrast, Ahmad and Manal's houses only had religious symbols and portraits on the walls (observations, Oct. 17, and Nov. 10, 18, 25). In the same manner, attire was different for each pair of students. Hassan and Eman were more modern and stylish in their attire; whereas Ahmad and Manal were more traditional, and especially Manal who wore the 'abaya', the traditional Yemini garment, and wore a head scarf. The home environment of Manal reflected specific aspects of the Yemini culture, and her collective life inside the house with cousins and their families also showed specific traits of a microculture.

Similarly, through conversations with student participants and multiple observations in their homes, I was able to identify certain aspects of each participant's subculture. First, sleep over was one of the practices that was at the subculture level. None of the families would allow sons or daughters simultaneously to sleep outside the house unless it were their grandparent's house. This was consistent with Li's (2008) discussion about how immigrant parents' cultural beliefs influenced their literacy practices. Li presented the theme of 'distrust' which was noticeable as the Sudanese parents did not allow their female children to visit friends from school at their homes or even have a sleep over. A similar theme emerged in my study as discussions with families revealed that parents were always concerned about their children's social circles. Parents were apprehensive about 'bad' friends. Multiple times Manal and her mother affirmed in

their conversations that Manal was not allowed to attend social occasions without her mother or sister's company. Her parents did not allow her to visit her friends' houses either- they could come over to her house. Manal's Yemini culture was more conservative than Eman's Lebanese culture. However, Manal was frustrated with not being able to break the cultural norm to sleep over a friend's house. Additionally, none of the families accepted the concept of boyfriend or girlfriend as it was not part of their cultural practices as indicated by Eman's mother and Ahmad's conversations. Since Manal's family was more conservative than other families, Manal, for example, was never part of any clubs because she felt she was different and because she believed that girls could not participate in sports like soccer. Such traditions were at the level of the subculture. The traditions either allowed or restricted the student's club or social circle and thus contributed to students' assimilation in mainstream and language acquisition. Third, the presence of hospitality that families demonstrated. During the home visits, they insisted on offering me something to drink and eat and they checked multiple times if I were comfortable. Eman's family gave me a bag of chocolate to take home for my children, and so did Manal's mother.

These examples such as sleepover, hospitality, and parents' supervision for visits and friends were at the subculture level of the families' culture. They were not visible for the regular outside observer. With these differences, it is unfair to unify all the families under one culture, Arabic, as it conceals many behaviors and practices at the subcultural level. Those hidden behaviors affected students' literacy since they either expanded or limited their social circle from which they develop their language and literacy habits.

## **Implications**

The areas of overlap and discord between cultures at home and at school for these Arab immigrant students, their families, and teachers were complicated, as were their effects on literacy and learning. As such, in the implications section, I cannot address simple “fixes”, but rather discuss nuanced implications for a variety of stakeholders including teachers and administrators.

**Implications for teachers and administrators.** This study suggests that educators’ knowledge of students should be extended beyond the walls of the classroom to encompass students’ home environments and outside-of-school experiences. Armed with this knowledge, teachers could bring it back to class so they can build on the assets that students have. Teaching a student should require knowing the whole being, with likes and dislikes, hobbies, interests, background information, and not only the academic subject matter. Understanding students’ cultures is also important, but complicated. Teachers need to have a general understanding of the countries from which their students hail, but also to understand that not all students from the same country will be from the same microculture. There is a fine line between learning about a culture and assuming that all children from that culture will behave or interact in the same way. The four students investigated in this study provide an opportunity for educators to see the pictures of whole students, particularly the home literacy practices that are not easily visible in school settings, as well as gain insight as to how students might view themselves. In this case, when we look outside of the classroom walls, we see that all students were making progress in English, at least developing the social language skills, that wasn’t obvious in the classrooms. They also had a wealth of content knowledge and familial support that went largely unseen and was certainly underutilized. In addition, while three of the four students were not active

participants in school-affiliated extracurricular activities, all were socially active within their communities. This information is not new to educators and researchers who have known for a long time that knowing our students as people makes us better teachers. Yet, what we hear these teachers and many others saying is that while they are eager to get to know their students, they have real constraints on their time given that they have a large number of students that they see every day- all of whom would be better taught if they knew them as whole people.

Another implication relates to the lens through which educators choose to view language learners. Student participants in the study had self-confidence in their ability to perform well in school, a type of self-efficacy that is positively linked to learning. Student participants reflected that within the first year, they learned the language and started realizing their assets. However, teachers, instead of looking at the progress made, measured students against standards of proficiency, and the students came up short. While students were identifying their own strengths and building on them, teachers were focusing on areas of deficit. I walked into the research with the impression that the two low-achieving students fell short when it came to being engaged in out-of-school activities. However, the research reflected that there were no differences between the two high-achieving and low-achieving students when it came to literacy practices outside the school. So, school grades were not a clear indication, in this study, of the kind of activities that students are engaged in outside the school. By looking at students with a deficiency lens, educators might miss the potential assets or ‘funds of knowledge’ that students possess that can facilitate learning. These wealthy resources in the students’ world outside the context of school can be the basis on which teachers draw upon to help students achieve.

Therefore, based on the findings of this study, I recommend that the school should exert effort and invest in developing culturally appropriate ways that would help engage parents. The

school can do that by increasing the cultural activities that involve parents and students to display their heritage and culture like having multicultural festivals or school gatherings where parents, teachers and students can meet and talk informally. Also, the presence of a community liaison or an advisory council can assist in bringing the culture of parents to the school and achieve understanding. In addition, since teachers seem to be willing to learn more about students' backgrounds and cultures, administrators can provide them with opportunities for professional development. Those professional development trainings can include specific workshops by specialized people about the traditions, habits, values, and beliefs of the Arab immigrant families. It is also important that teachers are trained in the different curricula to become aware of the educational system in the countries of students. The professional development opportunities can also include training in the history of the Arab countries so that teachers can have in-depth knowledge of their students.

On another side, administrators should provide more opportunities for parents of immigrant students to become involved in school. In this study, I found that the home literacy practices of the families were multifaceted and rich in capital. The Arabic culture and values dominated the families' literacy practices in valuing education, high expectations, and providing a good environment to learn at home. Even though teachers in the study were able to recognize this asset, they did not build on it. Therefore, administrators could take advantage of these potentials to create more cultural programs and activities that could promote a similar culture of learning and high values at school to advance all students. Parents' enthusiasm and high expectations could be brought to school through motivational guest speakers and other volunteering activities designed by the school. Additionally, teachers could create classroom assignments that would engage parents and bring their cultural beliefs and values to the

classroom. Involving parents in school can help them understand the American system better and they can help their children succeed.

### **Limitations**

Some of the limitations of the study are the small number of participants in the study. A bigger sample of students would have better represented the ethnic diversity of the student body. This might make the differences among the cultures of the groups more salient. Given the small number of participants, caution should be exercised in generalizing to a bigger group of Arab immigrant families.

Additionally, the study selected participants from the same school with homogeneous socioeconomic backgrounds. Having participants from different districts that are more diverse in terms of socioeconomic levels, and education level of parents might yield different results.

Another limitation is related to the home observations conducted. Parents might not have acted naturally since a stranger was observing and recording their actions and behaviors. Finally, though parents tried to be as natural as possible, it is possible that sometimes they did not really convey everything about their literacy practices.

The questions that I chose to ask are also a limitation. Asking different questions or asking them in a different way might have produced different answers and thus a different view of school and home.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study focused on the home literacy practices of students of Arab immigrant families. I hope this study will be a springboard for a full ethnographic research about Arab immigrant families that can uncover aspects of students' culture and identity formations.

The study shed light on some of the home literacy practices of the participants. Further research needs to be conducted that connects the home environment to the school environment. Studies like this would provide a holistic view on the similarities and differences between the two milieus in order to address the differences and build on the similarities to create a continuum between home and school. Similarly, studies could be conducted to examine the different approaches that could create opportunities for parents to become more engaged in the American school system.

### **Conclusion**

The study was conducted to unveil important literacy practices of Arab immigrant families that might not have been noticed by the American educational system. The purpose was to unfold the assets or ‘funds of knowledge’ that immigrant Arab families have so that educators might be able to build upon them in teaching the Arab immigrant students. This study sheds light on the home cultures of these students and the ways in which they might be influencing the students’ school experiences, literacy included.

The study revealed the value placed on education which resulted in students establishing a support system outside school, along with the motivating force and high expectations of the parents for their children. Teachers were able to notice those assets but were not able to build on them effectively since they lacked the link that connected the home with the school.

The unique cultural practices along with the distinctive home environments, results in students’ positional, cultural, and social identities. Extended families were a force that drove the children to achieve better at school and provided them with role model. Home observations along with conversations with students and family members brought to the surface many implications about culture, microculture, and subculture.

**APPENDIX A****Interview with First Family Member**

1. How is learning in your home country different from learning in the USA?
2. Tell me about your child's performance at school. What do you think are things that contribute to your child doing well at school? (If they mention school factors, I'll ask about home). What are the things that limit your child from doing well?
3. Are you involved in your child's school? What are your expectations for your child?
4. Being an immigrant family, do you see any differences in your child's school performance compared to students who were born here?
5. Tell me about your education and background.
6. What language do you speak mostly at home? Do you think speaking mostly this language at home makes a difference in how well or how quickly your child is learning English? Why or why not?
7. What kind of literacy activities you engage in at home with your children? Do you watch TV together? What do you watch? How often? Do you talk about books? Exchange news? What kind: political or social? Does your child see you reading or writing (for any purpose)? Are you subscribed to any magazines? Newspaper? How do you know about what's happening in town? Library visits?
8. Does your child help you with chores around the house? What responsibilities does your child have at home?
9. Tell me about the role of the extended family in your child's life. How do you think this impacts your child's academic achievement?
10. Tell me how Arabic culture is reflected in your family life. (cultural beliefs, values, out-of-state university or local one, attitude towards sleep over, prom, parties, hanging out with neighbors and friends, bad habits, your concerns as a parent, celebrating ethnic holidays, visiting family members and friends...)
11. Is there something else I need to know that would help my research?

الملحق الأول: مقابلة مع الفرد الأول في العائلة

### CONTINUED APPENDIX A

كيف يختلف التعليم في بلدك الأم عنه في الولايات المتحدة الأميركية؟

أخبرني عن أداء طفلك في المدرسة حالياً. ما هي، برأيك، العوامل التي تساهم في جعل أدائه الحالي جيداً؟ (إذا تم ذكر عوامل تتعلق بالمدرسة، يتم السؤال عن العوامل المرتبطة بالمنزل). ما هي العوامل التي تحد من أدائه؟

هل أنت منخرط في الإطار المدرسي لطفلك؟ ما هي توقعاتك له؟

كونكم عائلة مهاجرة، هل تلاحظ فرقاً في الأداء المدرسي بين طفلك والتلاميذ الذين ولدوا هنا؟

أخبرني عن مستواك التعليمي وخلفيتك التعليمية

بأي لغة تتحدثون معظم الوقت في المنزل؟ وهل تعتقد أن استخدام هذه اللغة في معظم الأحيان يحدث فرقاً في سرعة وإتقان ولدك لتعلم اللغة الإنكليزية؟ لماذا في كلتا الحالتين؟

ما هي أنواع النشاطات الثقافية الخاصة التي تشارك فيها مع طفلك في المنزل؟ هل تشاهدون التلفاز سوياً؟ ماذا تشاهدون؟ كم مرة تفعلون ذلك؟ هل تتبادلون الأحاديث حول المنشورات والكتب؟ ما هو نوع الأخبار التي تتحدثون عن آخر مستجداتها؟ أهى سياسية أم اجتماعية؟ هل يراك طفلك تقرأ أم تكتب (لأي هدف)؟ هل لديك اشتراك في إحدى المجلات؟ الجرائد؟ هل تزور المكتبات؟ كيف تأخذ علماً بالأحداث التي تدور في البلد؟

هل يساعدك طفلك في إتمام الأعمال المنزلية؟ ما هي المسؤوليات التي يتحملها في هذا الصدد؟

ما هو دور امتداد العائلة في حياة طفلك؟ باعتقادك، كيف تؤثر على إنجازاته الأكاديمية؟

كيف تنعكس الحضارة العربية في حياة عائلتك؟ (المعتقدات الثقافية، القيم، النظر إلى بعض المواقف والأحداث كالنوم

خارج المنزل، الحفلات، الخروج مع الجيران والأصدقاء، العادات السيئة، مخاوف الأهل، الاحتفال بالأعياد الدينية،

زيارات أفراد العائلة والأصدقاء...)

**APPENDIX B****Interview with Second Family Member**

1. Tell me about your education and career.
2. Tell me something about your immigration for example reasons for immigration.
3. How do you feel about Sunshine School? Why did you decide to send your child there?
4. How often do you visit your child's school? What are your expectations for your child?
5. What is the value of education for your family in the American society?
6. What do you think are things that contribute to doing well in school? (If they mention school factors, I'll ask about home). What are the things that limit students from doing well?
7. Who provides academic support for your child at home? What is the role of other family members in your child's education/life?
8. Tell me how Arabic culture is reflected in your family life. How do you maintain your traditions and customs in the United States?
9. Tell me about how you spend your time with your child: weekdays and weekend. What places do you visit?
10. Do you visit your home country? How often? Do you think going back and forth affects your child's performance or English development? If so, how? Do you feel teachers drawing on these travel experience in class?
11. Is there something else I need to know that would help my research?

الملحق الثاني: مقابلة مع الفرد الثاني في العائلة

### CONTINUED APPENDIX B

أخبرني عن تعليمك ومهنتك

أخبرني عن أمور تتعلق بالهجرة، كالسبب في ذلك مثلاً

؟ لماذا قررت إرسال ولدك إليها؟ Crestwood High School ما هي نظرتك حيال ثانوية

كم مرة تزور المدرسة؟ ما هي توقعاتك لطفلك؟

ما هي أهمية التعليم بالنسبة لعائلتك وسط المجتمع الأمريكي؟

باعتمادك، ما هي العوامل التي تساهم في تحسين الأداء المدرسي؟ (إذا تم ذكر عوامل تتعلق بالمدرسة، يتم السؤال عن العوامل المرتبطة بالمنزل). ما هي العوامل التي تحد من أدائه؟

من يقدم الدعم الأكاديمي لطفلك في المنزل؟ ما هي أدوار باقي أفراد العائلة في هذا السياق؟

أخبرني كيف تنعكس الحضارة العربية في حياة عائلتك؟ كيف تحافظ على عاداتك وتقاليديك وسط المجتمع الأمريكي؟

كيف تمضي العطل مع طفلك؟ ما هي الأماكن التي تزورونها؟

هل تزور بلدك الأم؟ متى؟ هل تعتقد أن كثرة تلك الزيارات والعودة إلى أميركا تؤثر على أداء طفلك أو تطور لغته الإنكليزية؟ إذا كان الجواب نعم، كيف ذلك؟ وهل تعتقد أن المعلمين يتأثرون بهذه التجربة في الصف؟

هل هناك أي معلومات تود إضافتها يمكن أن تساعدني في إنجاز البحث؟

**APPENDIX C****Interview One with Student**

1. How long have you been at Sunshine School? How do you feel about this school?
  
2. In your opinion, what are things (people, classes, activities, rules...) that contribute to doing well at school? (If the student talks about school factors, I'll ask about home). What are factors that limit students from doing well?
  
3. Being an immigrant student, do you see any differences in your school performance compared to students who were born here? Can you tell me how learning in your home country is different from learning in the USA?
  
4. Do favor any particular teacher? Why? Do you disfavor any particular teacher? Why? Tell me about a time you felt appreciated by a teacher. What happened and how did you feel? Tell me about a time you felt less appreciated by a teacher. What happened and how did you feel?
  
5. How do you think other classmates view you at school? Why? Do they respect you? Do they listen to what you say? Invite you to go out with them? If I say the name "X" in the class, what would your friends say?
  
6. How do teachers treat you? Do they give you an opportunity to share your opinion? Encourage you in class? Do they listen to your stories of past experiences? Do they allow

you to speak your native language in class? Why, or why not? Do they try to learn anything about your native language

7. Has any of your teachers taught you by trying to use things that you like or are good at doing outside school? If so, can you describe to me one homework assignment that a teacher gave you based on things you know previously or things that you do outside the school?

8. What school activities are you part of? Describe to me the activities you do outside school.

## الملحق الرابع: المقابلة الاولى مع الطالب

## CONTINUED APPENDIX C

أخبرني عن نفسك. بم تواجه صعوبة في المدرسة وبم تشعر أنك أكثر كفاءة

ما هي اللغة التي تستخدمها معظم الأحيان في المنزل؟ مع أصدقائك خارج المدرسة؟ هل تعتقد أن هذه اللغة تؤثر على تعلمك للإنجليزية؟ كيف؟

ماذا تتوقع لنفسك في المستقبل؟ ماذا عن توقعات الأهل؟ هل يدرك معلموك هذه التوقعات؟

متى يزور أهلك المدرسة؟ هل يؤثر ذلك على أدائك الدراسي؟ إن كان الجواب نعم، كيف ذلك؟

من هم الأصدقاء الذين تخرج برقتهم؟ كيف تقضون الوقت؟ كيف يؤثرون عليك؟ أعطني بعض الأمثلة

ما هي بعض القيم التي تقدرها وتتمناها في حضارتك؟ كيف تؤثر على التعليم الخاص بك وعلى علاقتك بالأصدقاء والجامعة والنشاطات التي تقوم بها؟

حدثني من فضلك، عن بعض النشاطات الروتينية التي تقوم بها في المنزل مع أفراد العائلة: هل تلعب مع إخوتك؟ تشاهد التلفاز مع عائلتك أم بمفردك؟ في كلتا الحالتين ماذا تشاهدون؟

صف الوقت الذي تمضيه برفقة الأهل. ماذا تفعلون؟ عم تتحدثون؟ ما هي الأماكن التي تذهبون إليها سوياً؟ هل لديك بطاقة اشتراك في المكتبة؟ ما هو عدد زياراتك إلى المكتبة؟ على من تقترح أن يزورها؟

هل تتناقش في الأمور المدرسية مع الأهل؟ ماهي العناوين التي يغطيها النقاش؟ هل تخبرهم عن الأمور التي يطلب منك إنجازها؟ صف إحدى هذه المحادثات وسلط الضوء قدر المستطاع على ما تذكره من التفاعل الذي جرى حينها

ما هي الاحتفالات/ النشاطات العائلية التي تشارك بها؟ ماذا تفعل؟ هل يمكنك أن تصف بدقة إحدى تلك النشاطات؟

أخبرني عن أفراد العائلة الذين تشعر أنهم يقدمون لك الدعم الدراسي وكيف يقدمونه؟ (ما هو دورهم في حياتك)؟

**APPENDIX D****Interview Two with Student**

1. Tell me about yourself: what are you good at and what do you find more difficult at school?
2. What language do you speak at home the most? With your friends outside of school? Do you think this language affects your learning English? How?
3. What are your expectations for yourself in the future? What do you think about your parents' expectations? Does your teacher realize those expectations?
4. How often do your parents visit school? Does this affect your performance? If so, how?
5. What friends do you hang out with? How do you spend your time together? How do your friends influence you? Give me examples.
6. What are some of values of your culture that you esteem? How do they influence your learning and life in terms of friends, college, and activities?
7. Please tell me something about your daily routine activities at home together with your family (parents, siblings): Do you play or do other things with your siblings? Do you watch TV with family? What do you watch? Do you watch TV alone? What do you watch?
8. Describe the time with your parents: What do you do? What do you talk about together? When you go out, where do you go to? Do you have a library card? How often do you visit the library? Who would suggest to go to the library?
9. Do you and your parents discuss school work? What kinds of school topics do you discuss most together? Do you ever talk to your parents about what you are assigned to read/write at school? Describe one of those conversations. Tell me as many details as you can remember about the interaction.
10. What are the family celebrations/activities that you participate in? What do you do? Can you describe one activity for me in detail?
11. Tell me about any other family members that you feel provide you support for your with learning at school. How do they provide that support? (Or what is their role in your life?)

الملحق الثالث: المقابلة الثانية مع الطالب

### CONTINUED APPENDIX D

ما هو شعورك حيالها؟ منذ متى وأنت في الثانوية

برأيك ما هي العوامل التي تحسن الأداء المدرسي (الناس، النشاطات، الصفوف، قواعد النظام...)? (إذا ذكر الطالب عوامل تتعلق بالمدرسة، يتم السؤال عن العوامل المرتبطة بالمنزل). ما هي العوامل التي تحد من أدائه؟

كونك تلميذ مهاجر، هل تلاحظ فرقاً في أدائك المدرسي بالمقارنة مع الطلاب الذين ولدوا في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية؟ هل يمكنك أن تخبرني كيف يختلف التعليم في بلدك الأم عنه في أميركا؟

هل يوجد معلم/ معلمة مفضل/ مفضلة لديك؟ لماذا؟ هل يوجد أحد لا يعجبك منهم؟ لماذا؟ أخبرني عن موقف شعرت فيه بتقدير أحدهم. ماذا حصل وبم شعرت؟ أخبرني عن موقف شعرت فيه بقلة تقدير أحدهم. ماذا حصل وبم شعرت؟

باعتقادك، كيف ينظر إليك زملاؤك في الصف؟ لماذا؟ هل يكون لك الاحترام؟ هل يصغون لما تقول؟ هل في الصف ماذا يقولون؟ "x" يدعوك للخروج معهم؟ إذا ذكرت اسم

كيف يعاملك المعلمون؟ هل يعطوك فرصة لمشاركة آرائك؟ هل يشجعونك داخل الصف؟ هل يستمعون لقصصك وتجاربك الماضية؟ هل يسمحون لك بالتكلم بلغتك الأصلية في الصف؟ لم نعم أو لم لا؟ هل يحاولون تعلمها منك؟

هل حاول أحد معلميك تعليمك إنجاز بعض الأشياء التي تحبها أو تتقنها خارج المدرسة؟ إن حصل ذلك، هل يمكن أن تصف واجب منزلي طلب منك إنجاز بناء على المعلومات التي تعرفها مسبقاً أو الأعمال التي تقوم بها خارج المدرسة؟

ما هي النشاطات المدرسية التي تشارك بها؟ صف النشاطات التي تقوم بها خارج المدرسة

**APPENDIX E****Interview with Teacher**

1. How long have you been teaching at Crestwood High School? How do you feel about this school?
2. What do you think are factors that contribute to students doing well in school? What are factors that limit students from doing well?
3. Do you see any differences between the performance and behavior of immigrant children versus children who are born here? Do you know what language X speaks at home? With friends? Do you feel that helps or hinders his/her acquisition of English?
4. Describe X to me. Behavior, school performance, anything (negative or positive) you note about X.
5. What kind of school support do you see X's family provide him/her with?
6. Do you see any impact of community, traditions, and culture on X and the decisions he/she makes? For example: where X wants to live, what college X wants to go to, what kind of education and career X will have? Do you notice whom X interacts with at school? DO you see any influence of culture in decisions like participating in extracurricular activities?
7. How important do you think extracurricular activities are in students' learning English?  
Is X part of any clubs, activities, and in-school interactions (e.g., cancer-awareness days, spirit week, ....) that you know of? Does X participate in any out-of-school activities?
8. Is there anything you can think of that distinguishes X from other students? Can you think of any ways in which X's personality reflected in his/her writings, speaking, actions, and interactions with others in the classroom? Can you give a specific example? (Does X write from personal experiences that are different from the classmates?)
9. Have you noticed any ways in which X's cultural beliefs and values influence X's academics in terms of choice of university, friends, activities?
10. Do you think that X's visits to his home country affect his performance (or not speaking English at home)? If so, how? Are there any ways in which you are able to draw on this experience in class?

11. Do you think that X has the same personality/identity/ present himself/herself at home like the one X displays at school? How do you think school helps develop X's identity?
12. Is there anything else you can tell me about X that would help my research?

**APPENDIX F****Information Letter for Parents**

**Title:** Arab Immigrant Families: Funds of Knowledge

**Investigator:** Hiba Elhajj

**Research Purpose:** As part of my doctoral studies at Wayne State University, I am conducting a research study at Crestwood High School that involves Arabic immigrant families. The study will look at the home literacy practices of Arabic immigrant families in order to determine the assets that these families possess. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are an Arabic immigrant family who has been in the United States for over a year and less than 5 years. Only people who choose to take part will be included in this research.

Please take your time to make your decision. If you decide to participate, please provide me with your contact information as requested at the bottom of this letter.

**Duration and Procedures:** The study will be conducted within 6 to 8 weeks. If you and your child choose to participate in this study, the following will take place:

1. Two adult family members (father, mother, grandmother/father, aunt, uncle...) will be interviewed once that will be approximately 45 minutes long.
2. Your child will be interviewed 2 times at school during lunch - for 30 minutes each.
3. I will make 2 home visits to observe home literacy practices. Each visit will last 60 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no risks to your participation in this study. There may be no direct benefits to you in this study. However, possible benefits to you and your child for taking part in this research study are that you will be aware of the specific literacy practices that schools value the most. In addition, the questions in the interview will serve as a

reflection tool for you and your child to look into your literacy practices and determine the ones that are most effective.

Upon the completion of data collection, your family will be paid \$50 for participation as compensation for your time and any inconvenience.

**Confidentiality:** All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Any data that will be collected will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed at the end of the study.

**Voluntary Participation:** Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Mrs. Hiba Elhajj at (313)510-5559. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628.

By filling in the information below and signing this form, you are giving me permission to contact you to be part of this research.

Parent Name \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

❖ **Please return this form to Mrs. Elhaji, Room 108 or place it in her**

## Continued Appendix F

### رسالة معلومات للأهل

العنوان: العائلات العربية المهاجرة: مناهل المعرفة

الباحثة: السيدة هبة الحاج

Wayne State University الهدف من البحث: كجزء من دراسات الدكتوراه التي أنجزها في جامعة التي تضم عائلات عربية مهاجرة. ستركز Crestwood High School أجري دراسة بحثية في ثانوية الدراسة على الممارسات الدراسيه التي تتم في منازل العائلات العربية المهاجرة بهدف تحديد اصول المعرفه التي تمتلكها هذه العائلات. طلب منك المشاركة في هذه الدراسة كونك من عائلة مهاجرة تقطن في الولايات المتحدة الأميركية فترة تزيد عن السنة ولا تقل عن الخمس سنوات. الأشخاص الذين يقررون المشاركة في هذه الدراسة هم فقط من ستدرج أسماؤهم في البحث

الرجاء أخذ الوقت الكافي لحسم قرار المشاركة، وفي حال الموافقة الرجاء تزويدي بالمعلومات المطلوبة في أسفل الرسالة للتواصل معكم

مدة البحث وإجراءاته: ستجرى الدراسة خلال 6 إلى 8 أسابيع، في حال مشاركتك وطفلك في هذه الدراسة سوف:

تتم مقابلة فردين راشدین من العائلة (أب، أم، جد، جدة، عم، عمة...) مرة واحدة ولمدة 45 دقيقة \*

تتم مقابلة طفلك مرتين في المدرسة خلال الغداء وستكون مدة كل مقابلة 30 دقيقة \*

سأقوم بزيارتكم مرتين في منزلكم لمشاهدة الممارسات الثقافيه التي تقومون بها. مدة كل زيارة ساعة \* واحدة.

المخاطر والفوائد: لا يوجد مخاطر إزاء مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة. من المحتمل ألا تنتفع بشكل مباشر منها. ومع ذلك، ربما يكون هناك فوائد لك ولطفلك جراء المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية كأن تكونوا على بيئة من النشاطات الثقافيه الأكثر تقديراً وأهمية لدى المدرسة. إضافة إلى أن الأسئلة التي ستطرح خلال المقابلة ستكون بمثابة أداة تتيح لك ولطفلك النظر ملياً بالنشاطات الثقافيه التي تمارسونها ومعرفة أكثرها تأثيراً وفعالية

بعد الانتهاء من جمع المعلومات، سيتم دفع مبلغ \$50 لعائلتك بدل المشاركة في الدراسة كتعويض عن الوقت أو أي إزعاج لحق بهم جراء المشاركة في الدراسة

السرية: كل المعلومات المتعلقة بك والتي يتم جمعها خلال الدراسة تبقى سرية للحد المسموح به قانوناً. سوف يعرف عنك في الدراسة بواسطة رمز معين. كل المعلومات التي جمعت ستكون موضوعة في خزانة مغلقة ويتم تلفها عند انتهاء الدراسة

المشاركات التطوعية: المشاركة في هذه الدراسة بشكل طوعي. لديك الحق في عدم المشاركة في الدراسة، كما لديك حرية الإجابة فقط عن الأسئلة التي تريدها، ولديك حرية الانسحاب من الدراسة متى شئت

سبل الاتصال: إذا كان لديك أسئلة حالية أو مستقبلية تتعلق بالدراسة يمكن الاتصال بالسيدة هبة الحاج على الرقم التالي (313) 510-5559. إذا كان لديك أسئلة أو أثرت مخاوفك حول حقك كمشارك في البحث، يمكن على الرقم "Institutional Review Board" الاتصال برئيس مجلس المراجعة المؤسسي

(313) 577-1628.

إن ملء المعلومات أدناه وتوقيع هذا النموذج، هو بمثابة إعطائي الإذن للتواصل معك كونك جزءاً من هذا البحث.

اسم الوالد \_\_\_\_\_ اسم التلميذ \_\_\_\_\_  
 رقم الهاتف \_\_\_\_\_  
 العنوان \_\_\_\_\_  
 \*التوقيع \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX G****[Behavioral] Research Informed Consent**

Title of Study: *Arabic Immigrant Families: Funds of Knowledge*

Principal Investigator (PI): Hiba Kahil Elhajj

When we say “you” in this consent form, we mean you or your child; “we” means the researchers and other staff.

**Purpose**

You are being asked to be in a research study that explores the home literacy practices of Arabic immigrant families and the perspectives of students, their parents, and teachers about those literacy practices because you meet the selection criteria which are the following: being a parent of a student who is in the English-as-a-Second-Language Program at Crestwood High School and being an immigrant in the United States for more than one year but less than five years at the time of conducting the study. This study is being conducted at Crestwood High School and at your home. The estimated number of study participants to be enrolled at Crestwood High School is about four students as well as about sixteen other participants that include two teachers and two family members for each student participant.

**Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

In this research study, Mrs. Hiba Elhajj, a graduate student in the College of Education at Wayne State University, is looking at the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers related to the home literacy practices of immigrant Arabic students in order to investigate the source of capital in the homes of Arabic immigrant families. It is important to investigate the daily literacy routines from the point of view of those participants because they will shed light on students’ cultural identities and deepen the knowledge about the students’ performance at school.

## **Study Procedures**

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to do the following tasks during the eight week period of the study:

1. You, your spouse, and/or any other adult family member residing in the house, will take part in an interview with a set of questions about the specific literacy practices that are conducted at home. The interview will include questions about the daily house routines, study habits, and activities you do with your child. Interviews with adults will be conducted within one home visit of the participants. Each interview will be 45 minutes long and will be recorded.
2. Your child will be part of two interviews conducted at school during lunch. The first interview will be related to your child's literacy practices outside school in which he/she answers questions about his/her time with friends, certain cultural practices, and daily routine literacy practices with the family. The second interview will be about school in which your child will answer questions about his/her school performance, teachers, classmates, and school activities he/she is part of. These interviews will be conducted during school. Each interview will be 30 minutes long and will be recorded.
3. In addition to interviews, two observations will be conducted to watch the literacy practices of your family outside school: the first observation will be during the weekday, while the second observation will be during the weekend. Each of the observations will be between 45-60 minutes long.
4. Your identities will be protected by using codes and numbers to refer to you. Interviews will be saved on my desk top, encrypted with a password, and then destroyed at the end of the study.

### **Benefits**

There may be no direct benefits to you in this study. However, possible benefits to you and your child for taking part in this research study are that you will be aware of the specific literacy practices that schools value the most. In addition, the questions of the interview will serve as a reflection tool for you and your child to look into your literacy practices and determine the ones that are most effective. The study will help educators understand the specific home literacy practices of Arabic immigrant families.

### **Risks**

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study. However, possible psychological risk can occur by participating in the interviews. You may choose not to take part in the interviews if you appear to be at risk during the interview.

**Study Costs**

Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

**Compensation**

For taking part in this research study, your family will be compensated in the amount of \$50 for your time and inconvenience upon completion of the data collection.

**Confidentiality**

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.] may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

The audiotape recordings of you will be used for research or educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. You have the right to review and/or edit the recordings. No one other than the principal investigator and the doctoral advisor will have access to the recordings which will be destroyed at the end of the study. The transcription will not bear the name or any indication related to the participants. All information collected about you during the course of

the study will be saved on the principal investigator's desktop in a secure file protected by a password.

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

**Questions**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Mrs. Hiba Elhajj at (313)510-5559. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant / Legally authorized representative \*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of participant / Legally authorized representative

\*

Time

---

---

Signature of witness\*\*

Date

---

---

Printed of witness\*\*

Time

---

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## الموافقة المستنيرة على البحوث السلوكية

## CONTINUED APPENDIX G

عنوان الدراسة: العائلات العربية المهاجرة: مناهل المعرفة

الباحثة الرئيسية: هبة كحيل الحاج

عندما نقول "أنت" في هذا النموذج، فإننا نعني أنت أو طفلك، "نحن" تعني الباحثين أو فريق العمل

الهدف:

لقد طلب منك المشاركة في دراسة بحثية تستكشف الممارسات المنزلية لمحو الأمية للعائلات العربية المهاجرة ووجهات نظر الطلبة وأهاليهم والمعلمين حيال تلك الأنشطة بسبب توافر معايير الاختيار التالية لديك: كونك والد/ة لتلميذ يتعلم ، وكونك أيضاً مهاجر يقطن في الولايات Crestwood High School الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية بعد لغته الأصلية في ثانوية المتحدة الأميركية لفترة تزيد عن السنة ولا تقل عن الخمس سنوات ومتواجد فيها خلال فترة إجراء الدراسة. تجرى هذه وفي منزل. ويقدر عدد المشاركين في هذه الدراسة بأربعة طلاب من Crestwood High School الدراسة في ثانوية إضافة إلى ستة عشر مشارك من بينهم معلمين اثنين وفردين من أفراد عائلة كل Crestwood High School ثانوية تلميذ مشارك في الدراسة

الرجاء قراءة النموذج التالي وطرح أي سؤال يتبادر إلى ذهنك قبل الموافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة

في هذه الدراسة البحثية، تحاول السيدة هبة الحاج، طالبة دراسات عليا في كلية التربية في جامعة

، استكشاف وجهات نظر الأهل، والطلاب، والمعلمين في الممارسات المنزلية لمحو "Wayne State University" الأمية للطلاب العرب المغتربين، للتحقق في مصدر ثقافتهم بهدف تحديد اصول المعرفة في منازل

أسرهم. من المهم التحقق من الممارسات الثقافية اليومية من وجهة نظر هؤلاء المشاركين لأن ذلك سيسلط الضوء على الهويات الثقافية للطلبة ويعمق المعرفة حول أدائهم الدراسي

خطوات الدراسة

في حال الموافقة على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية، سوف يطلب منك القيام بالمهام التالية خلال فترة ثمانية أسابيع من إجراء الدراسة

1- أنت أو زوجتك، و/أو أي أحد من أفراد الأسرة الراشدين الآخرين الذين يقيمون في المنزل، سيشاركون في مقابلة - للإجابة عن مجموعة من الأسئلة حول الممارسات الثقافية التي تجري في المنزل. وسوف تشمل المقابلة أسئلة حول الإجراءات اليومية في المنزل، عادات الدراسة، والأنشطة التي تقوم بها مع طفلك. المقابلات مع الراشدين سوف تجرى في زيارة واحدة لمنزلهم. وستكون مدة المقابلة 45 دقيقة وستكون مسجلة

سيشارك طفلك في مقابلتين يتم إجراؤهما في المدرسة أثناء فترة الغداء. الأولى ستكون مرتبطة بالممارسات الثقافية - لطفلك خارج المدرسة، حيث يجيب/تجيب عن أسئلة حول الوقت الذي يقضيه مع أصدقائه/ا، بعض العادات الدراسية، والممارسات الروتينية الثقافية اليومية مع العائلة. المقابلة الثانية ستكون مرتبطة بالمدرسة حيث سيجيب طفلك عن أسئلة تتعلق بأدائه المدرسي، معلميه، زملاؤه، والنشاطات المدرسية التي يشارك بها. وستجرى هذه المقابلات في المدرسة. ستكون مدة كل مقابلة 30 دقيقة وستكون مسجلة

بالإضافة إلى المقابلات، سيتم إجراء رصدتين في المنزل لمشاهدة الممارسات الثقافية خارج المدرسة: الرصد الأول -3 خلال أحد أيام الأسبوع، في حين أن الرصد الثاني سيكون خلال عطلة نهاية الأسبوع. سيكون كل رصد بين 45 و60 دقيقة تقريباً.

4- هويتك الحقيقية ستكون سرية ومحمية بواسطة رموز وأرقام فقط تشير إليك. سيتم حفظ المقابلات على جهاز الكمبيوتر الخاص بي وستكون مشفرة ومحمية بكلمة سر وستتلف في نهاية الدراسة

المنافع: ربما لن يكون هناك منافع مباشرة من هذه الدراسة. ومع ذلك، ربما يكون هناك فوائد لك ولطفلك جراء المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية كأن تكونوا على بينة من النشاطات الثقافية الأكثر تقديراً وأهمية لدى المدرسة. إضافة إلى أن الأسئلة التي ستطرح خلال المقابلة ستكون بمثابة أداة تتيح لك ولطفلك النظر ملياً بالنشاطات الثقافية التي تمارسونها. ومعرفة أكثرها تأثيراً وفعالية. كما أن الدراسة ستساعد المدرسين على فهم ممارسات محو الأمية للأسر العربية المهاجرة.

المخاطر:

حالياً، لا توجد مخاطر معروفة للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة، ومع ذلك، يمكن الحديث عن مخاطر نفسية من الممكن أن تنشأ خلال المشاركة في المقابلات. يمكنك عدم المشاركة في المقابلات إذا شعرت أنها ستشكل خطراً عليك

تكاليف الدراسة:

المشاركة في هذه الدراسة ستكون دون أي تكلفة عليك

التعويضات:

بعد الانتهاء من جمع المعلومات، سيتم دفع مبلغ \$50 لعائلتك بدل مشاركة في الدراسة كتعويض عن الوقت أو أي إزعاج لحق بهم جراء المشاركة في الدراسة

السرية:

كل المعلومات المتعلقة بك والتي يتم جمعها خلال الدراسة تبقى سرية للحد المسموح به قانوناً. سوف يعرف عنك في الدراسة بواسطة رمز معين. المعلومات التي تمتلك بشكل شخصي لن تنشر دون إذن خطي منك. مع ذلك، فإن راعي في جامعة "The Institutional Review Board" الدراسة،

Food ، أو الوكالات الاتحادية التي تخضع للرقابة التنظيمية (كمديرية الأغذية والأدوية Wayne State University and Drug Administration (FDA) ، ومكاتب حماية الأبحاث

، ومكاتب الحقوق المدنية (OHRP) Office for Human Research Protections

وغيرها...) يمكن أن تراجع تلك المعلومات وتطلع عليها (OCR) Office of Civil Rights

. عندما تنشر نتائج هذه الدراسة أو تناقش في المؤتمرات، لن يتم عرض معلومات تكشف عن شخصيتك الحقيقية أو هويتك

إذا تم استخدام التسجيلات الصوتية الخاصة بك في البحث أو لأهداف تعليمية، لن تكشف هويتك وستبقى سرية. يمكنك مراجعة و/أو تعديل التسجيلات، ولا أحد سوى الباحث الرئيسي أو مستشار المشرف يمكنه الاطلاع على هذه الأشرطة التي سيتم تلفها عند الانتهاء من الدراسة. تُنسخ الأشرطة ستكون دون أسماء أو أي دلالات لهوية المشاركين، كما أن المعلومات الخاصة بك والتي جمعت خلال الدراسة سيتم حفظها على جهاز الكمبيوتر الخاص بالباحث الرئيسي والذي سيكون محمياً بكلمة سر

المشاركة الطوعية / الانسحاب

المشاركة في هذه الدراسة يتم بشكل طوعي. لديك الحق في عدم المشاركة في الدراسة، كما لديك حرية الإجابة فقط عن الأسئلة التي تريدها، ولديك حرية الانسحاب من الدراسة متى شئت. وقراراتك لا تغير أي علاقة حالية أو مستقبلية مع أو الشركات التابعة لها، أو أي خدمات أخرى من حقك الحصول عليها Wayne State University جامعة

الاستفسارات والأسئلة

إذا كان لديك أسئلة حالية أو مستقبلية تتعلق بالدراسة يمكن الاتصال بالسيدة هبة الحاج على الرقم التالي (313)510-5559. إذا كان لديك أسئلة أو أثرت مخاوفك حول حقك كمشارك في البحث، يمكن الاتصال برئيس مجلس المراجعة على الرقم (313) 1628-577. إذا لم يكن بمقدورك التواصل مع فريق "Institutional Review Board" المؤسسي للأبحاث على الرقم Wayne البحث، أو إذا أردت التواصل مع أحد غير أفراد الفريق، يمكنك الاتصال بمحامي جامعة (313) 1628-577 لطرح الأسئلة أو الاستفسار أو الشكاوى

الموافقة على المشاركة في دراسة بحثية

للموافقة الطوعية على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة يجب أن توقع أدناه. إذا اخترت المشاركة في هذه الدراسة يمكنك الانسحاب في أي وقت. أنت لا تتخلى عن أي من حقوقك القانونية من خلال التوقيع هذا النموذج

توقيعك أدناه يشير إلى أن قد قرأت، أو قد قرأ لك، هذا النموذج بأكمله، بما في ذلك المخاطر والمنافع، وتم الرد على كل أسئلتك. ستعطى لك نسخة من هذا النموذج

توقيع المشارك/ ممثل مخول عنه قانونياً التاريخ

اسم المشارك/ ممثل مخول عنه قانونياً الوقت

توقيع الشاهد التاريخ

اسم الشاهد الوقت

توقيع الشخص الذي يحصل على الموافقة التاريخ

اسم الشخص الذي يحصل على الموافقة الوقت

**APPENDIX H****[Behavioral] Documentation of Adolescent Assent Form (Ages 13-17)****Title: Arabic Immigrant Families****Study Investigator: Mrs. Hiba Elhajj****Why am I here?**

This is a research study. Only students who choose to take part are included in research studies. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are an Arabic immigrant student who has been living in the United States for over a year but less than 5 years. Please take time to make your decision. Talk to your family about it and be sure to ask questions about anything you don't understand.

**Why are they doing this study?**

This study is being done to find out about the specific home literacy practices that you are engaged in outside of school such as daily house routines, study habits, and activities you do with your parents, sibling, and/or other family members.

**What will happen to me?**

If you choose to participate in this study, the following will take place:

1. I will interview you 2 times at school during lunch. Each interview will be 30 minutes.
2. I will do two observations of your literacy practices at home: One time during the week and another time during the weekend.

**How long will I be in the study?**

You will be in the study for around three weeks.

**Will the study help me?**

You may not benefit from being in this study; however information from this study may help other people in the future such as teachers because they will get to know about specific cultural home literacy practices that Arabic families have and build on those practices to help Arabic students succeed at school.

**Will anything bad happen to me?**

There are no risks at this time to participation in this study.

**Will I get paid to be in the study?**

There will be no compensation for you when you participate in the study.

**Do my parents or guardians know about this?**

This study information has been given to your parents/guardian. You can talk this over with them before you decide.

**What about confidentiality?**

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.] may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

The audiotape recordings of you will be used for research or educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. You have the right to review and/or edit the tapes. No one other than the principal investigator and the doctoral advisor will have access to the recordings which will be destroyed at the end of the study. The transcription will not bear the name or any indication related to the participants. All information collected about you during the course of the study will be saved on the principal investigator's desktop in a secure file protected by a password.

**What if I have any questions?**

For questions about the study please call Mrs. Elhadj at (313)510-5559. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

**Do I have to be in the study?**

You don't have to be in this study if you don't want to or you can stop being in the study at any time. Please discuss your decision with your parents and researcher. No one will be angry if you decide to stop being in the study.

**AGREEMENT TO BE IN THE STUDY**

Your signature below means that you have read the above information about the study and have had a chance to ask questions to help you understand what you will do in this study. Your signature also means that you have been told that you can change your mind later and withdraw if you want to. By signing this assent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights. You will be given a copy of this form.

---

Signature of Participant (13 yrs & older) Date

---

Printed name of Participant (13 yrs & older)

---

\*\*Signature of Witness (When applicable) Date

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Printed Name of Witness

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نموذج موافقة لمراهقين للمشاركة في الدراسة

## CONTINUED APPENDIX H

عنوان الدراسة: العائلات العربية المهاجرة

الباحثة: هبة الحاج

لم أنا هنا؟

هذه الورقة عبارة عن دراسة بحثية. في هذا النوع من الدراسات يمكن فقط لمن اختار المشاركة شخصياً أن يكون جزءاً من الدراسة. طلب منك المشاركة في هذه الدراسة كونك طالب عربي مهاجر يقطن في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية لفترة تزيد عن السنة ولا تقل عن الخمس سنوات. الرجاء أخذ الوقت الكافي لحسم قرارك بعد التشاور مع عائلتك حول هذا الموضوع والسؤال عن أي معلومة تود الاستفسار عنها.

لم تجر هذه الدراسة؟

يتم إجراء هذه الدراسة للتعرف على نشاطات ثقافية منزلية معينه والتي تشارك فيها خارج المدرسة كالروتين المنزلي اليومي، الأمور المتعلقة بالدراسة، النشاطات التي تقوم بها مع والديك وإخوتك، و/أو أفراد العائلة الآخرين.

ماذا سيحصل معي؟

إذا قررت المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، سوف

تتم مقابلتك مرتين في المدرسة خلال فترة الغداء وستكون مدة كل مقابلة 30 دقيقة

ما هي المدة الزمنية التي سألقي خلالها ضمن إطار الدراسة؟

سوف تكون منخرطاً في الدراسة حوالي الثلاثة أسابيع

هل ستساعدني الدراسة؟

ربما لن تستفيد من هذه الدراسة، ولكن على أي حال فإن المعلومات الواردة فيها ستفيد أشخاص آخرين في المستقبل كالمعلمين لأنهم سيتعرفون من خلالها على بعض النشاطات المنزلية لمحو الأمية التي تمارسها العائلات العربية والاستفادة من هذه النشاطات والممارسات لمساعدة الطلاب العرب للنجاح في المدرسة

هل سيصيبني أي مكروه؟

لا يوجد حالياً أي مخاطر من جراء المشاركة في الدراسة

هل سألقى بدل مادي لقاء مشاركتي في الدراسة؟

لا يوجد أي تعويض مادي للمشاركة في الدراسة

هل يعلم والدي أو أولياء أمري بهذه الدراسة؟

هذا النموذج أعطي لهم وبإمكانك مباحثتهم بالأمر قبل اتخاذ القرار بالمشاركة

ماذا عن السرية؟

كل المعلومات المتعلقة بك والتي يتم جمعها خلال الدراسة تبقى سرية للحد المسموح به قانوناً. سوف يعرف عنك في الدراسة بواسطة رمز معين. المعلومات التي تمتلك بشكل شخصي لن تنشر دون إذن خطي منك. مع ذلك، فإن راعي في جامعة "The Institutional Review Board" الدراسة،

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ، أو الوكالات الاتحادية التي تخضع للرقابة التنظيمية (كمديرية الأغذية والأدوية Wayne State University ، ومكاتب حماية الأبحاث (FDA) ،

، ومكاتب الحقوق المدنية (OHRP) Office for Human Research Protections

، وغيرها...) يمكن أن تراجع تلك المعلومات وتطلع عليها (OCR) Office of Civil Rights

. عندما تنشر نتائج هذه الدراسة أو تناقش في المؤتمرات، لن يتم عرض معلومات تكشف عن شخصيتك الحقيقية أو هويتك

إذا تم استخدام التسجيلات الصوتية الخاصة بك في البحث أو لأهداف تعليمية، لن تكشف هويتك وستبقى سرية. يمكنك مراجعة و/أو تعديل التسجيلات، ولا أحد سوى الباحث الرئيسي أو مستشار المشرف يمكنه الاطلاع على هذه الأشرطة التي سيتم تلفها عند الانتهاء من الدراسة. تُسخ الأشرطة ستكون دون أسماء أو أي دلالات لهوية المشاركين، كما أن المعلومات الخاصة بك والتي جمعت خلال الدراسة سيتم حفظها على جهاز الكمبيوتر الخاص بالباحث الرئيسي والذي سيكون محمياً بكلمة سر

: يجب أن يتم ذكر المعلومات التالية أمام السلطات المختصة في حال نتج قلق معين خلال إتمام الدراسة حول

إحتمال إساءة معاملة الأطفال أو كبار السن \*

الكشف عن أنشطة إجرامية غير قانونية، أو تعاطي مواد غير مشروعة أو ممارسة العنف \*

ماذا لو كان لدي بعض الأسئلة؟

إذا كان لديك أسئلة حول الدراسة الرجاء الاتصال بالسيدة هبة الحاج على الرقم التالي (313) 5559-510

إذا كان لديك أسئلة أو أثرت مخاوفك حول حقك كمشارك في البحث، يمكن الاتصال برئيس مجلس المراجعة المؤسسي على الرقم (313) 1628-577. إذا لم يكن بمقدورك التواصل مع فريق البحث، أو "Institutional Review Board" للأبحاث على الرقم (313) 577-Wayne إذا أردت التواصل مع أحد غير أفراد الفريق، يمكنك الاتصال بمحامي جامعة 1628 لمناقشة الصعوبات، الحصول على معلومات، أو لعرض المدخلات من الدراسة

هل يجب أن أكون في الدراسة؟

لا يجب أن تكون في الدراسة إذا لم تكن ترغب بذلك ويمكنك الانسحاب متى أردت. الرجاء مناقشة قرار المشاركة في الدراسة مع الأهل والباحث. لا أحد سيندبر إن قررت عدم المشاركة

:اتفاقية المشاركة في الدراسة

توقيعك أدناه يعني أنك قد قرأت المعلومات الواردة أعلاه حول الدراسة ويمكنك من طرح أي سؤال لفهم دورك في الدراسة. توقيعك يعني أيضاً أنك أحطت الباحث علماً بإمكانية انسحابك من الدراسة ساعة تشاء. إن توقيعك لنموذج الموافقة هذا لا يجرّدك من حقوقك القانونية. سيتم إعطاؤك نسخة عن هذا النموذج

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توقيع المشترك (13 سنة) التاريخ

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اسم المشترك (13 سنة وأكثر)

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**APPENDIX I****[Behavioral] Research Informed Consent for Teachers**

Title of Study: *Arabic Immigrant Families: Funds of Knowledge*

Principal Investigator (PI): Hiba Kahil Elhajj

**Purpose**

You are being asked to be in a research study that explores the home literacy practices of Arabic immigrant families and the perspectives of students, their parents, and teachers about those practices because you are the content area teacher of a student who is in the English-as-a-Second-Language Program at Crestwood High School. This study is being conducted at Crestwood High School. The estimated number of study participants to be enrolled at Crestwood High School is about four students as well as about sixteen other participants that include two teachers and two family members for each student participant.

**Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

In this research study, Mrs. Hiba Elhajj, a graduate student in the College of Education at Wayne State University, is looking at the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers related to the home literacy practices of immigrant Arabic students. The intention of Mrs. Elhajj is to investigate the source of capital in the homes of Arabic immigrant families. The perceptions of students, parents, and teachers will provide an insight of the different views and opinions that students, parents, and teachers have about students' home literacy practices which will shed light on students' cultural identities and deepen the knowledge about the students' performance at school.

**Study Procedures**

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to do the following tasks during the eight week period of the study:

1. You will take part in an interview about the student participant in your class. The questions will be related to the student's home literacy practices and source of capital available outside the school. In addition, questions will include the performance, behavior, study habits, and cultural or familial impact on the student's learning. The interview will be 45 to 60 minutes long and it will be recorded.
2. Your identity will be protected by using codes and numbers to refer to you. Interviews will be saved on my desk top and encrypted with a password and then destroyed at the end of the study.

### **Benefits**

As a participant in this research study, there may be no direct benefits to you in this study. However, information from this study may benefit educators by informing them about the cultural capital available in Arabic immigrant families, may help teachers develop knowledge of how Arabic immigrant families use literacy in their daily routines, and may increase knowledge of useful ways to connect with students and build on their backgrounds in class.

### **Risks**

There are no known risks at this time to participate in this study. However, possible psychological risk can occur by participating in interviews. You may choose not to take part in the interviews if it appears to you that you are at risk during the interview.

**Study Costs** Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

### **Compensation**

For taking part in this research study, you will be compensated in the amount of \$25 for your time and inconvenience.

### **Confidentiality**

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written

permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.] may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

The audiotape recordings of you will be used for research or educational purposes, and your identity will be protected or disguised. No identifiers of names will be stored anywhere. The transcription will not bear the name or any indication related to the participants. You will be identified in the research by a code name. Consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in primary investigator's office. No one will have access to recordings or documentations other than the primary investigator, and the doctoral advisor, and the recordings will be destroyed 5 years after the end of the research.

### **Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer in the interview. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or Crestwood High School, or other services you are entitled to receive.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Mrs. Hiba Elhadj at (313)510-5559. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If

you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant / Legally authorized representative *	Date

Printed name of participant / Legally authorized representative *	Time

Signature of witness**	Date

Printed of witness**	Time

Signature of person obtaining consent	Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent	Time

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**ABSTRACT****FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE OF ARAB IMMIGRANT FAMILIES: AN  
EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS,  
PARENTS, AND TEACHERS**

by

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With the growing numbers of English learners in American schools, the Federal Government has mandated special services and programs to meet the needs of this population which increased research about the best strategies that would help close the gap between ELs and their peers. Nonetheless, the current education system still views ELs from a deficit lens which focuses on closing the gaps in students' education instead of focusing on the assets that they have. Therefore, there is a specific need to bridge the home and school environments together so that teachers can build on the skills that students bring from home to teach them.

The purpose of this study was to look at the home literacy practices of Arab immigrant families to determine the capital embedded in Arab immigrant students' daily routines and skills. By examining the perceptions of the concerned people: students, parents, and teachers about the home literacy practices of Arab immigrant students, the study reveals the daily

literacy routines and assets that students have. In addition, the study sheds light on the formations of students' positional, social, and cultural identities.

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### **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

I was born in Lebanon to parents whose primary goal in life was to see their children accomplished and highly educated. Right after I graduated from high school, I was asked to work for my former school as a teacher's assistant. Being in a classroom setting, ultimately, influenced my decision to the kind of career I wanted for myself. I made a conscious decision to go for my Bachelor of Arts degree in English Language. It was such an eye-opening experience to discover my innate love for teaching and being among children.

I immigrated to the United States in 2002. After I earned my Master's Degree in Education, I started teaching mainstream English in 2004. I earned my Education Specialist and I started working at a public school teaching English as a second language up until today. As an immigrant and an English as a second language learner myself, I have always realized the assets that I had, and I built on them to become more successful. I have always tried to help my colleagues at school realize the 'funds of knowledge' that immigrant students have and build on them to increase students' chances of success in American schools.

I believe that, with hard work and perseverance, all individuals are capable of attaining their dreams. Therefore, I endeavor to transform students to active participants in their education. I want to help them develop skills and knowledge necessary for them to become independent learners and productive members in the community.

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