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## “Frozen Up Like an Ice Cube!”: The Influence of Situated Learning on Pre-Service Teachers' Cultural and Linguistic Awareness

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## “Frozen Up Like an Ice Cube!”: The Influence of Situated Learning on Pre-Service Teachers' Cultural and Linguistic Awareness

### Abstract

The overall goal of this study was to explore the influence of situated learning experiences on pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings of their future Arab students. This study investigated in part the interaction between culturally diverse families and pre-service teachers. It also explored changes in pre-service teachers' attitudes and knowledge, their perceived applications of the situated experience to their future teaching, and the families' reactions to this experience. Twelve Arab families volunteered to host 25 pre-service teachers as participants of this study. Results showed that the situated learning experience helped the pre-service teachers develop their cultural knowledge as well as learn about Arab families, Arab culture, and their future classrooms. The study concluded that the experience helped the pre-service teachers gain new knowledge, positive attitudes, and some ideas for their future diverse classrooms. It offered a great opportunity for families to explore how important it is to meet with teachers and it also empowered pre-service teachers with some powerful authentic experiences including meeting the family, sharing their knowledge, exploring their understandings, and discussing and comparing their knowledge with each other.

### Keywords

English Language Learners, Arabic-Speaking Families, Diversity, Preservice Teachers' Cultural and Linguistic Awareness, Culturally Diverse Families

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## **“Frozen Up Like an Ice Cube!”: The Influence of Situated Learning on Pre-Service Teachers' Cultural and Linguistic Awareness**

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*The overall goal of this study was to explore the influence of situated learning experiences on pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings of their future Arab students. This study investigated in part the interaction between culturally diverse families and pre-service teachers. It also explored changes in pre-service teachers' attitudes and knowledge, their perceived applications of the situated experience to their future teaching, and the families' reactions to this experience. Twelve Arab families volunteered to host 25 pre-service teachers as participants of this study. Results showed that the situated learning experience helped the pre-service teachers develop their cultural knowledge as well as learn about Arab families, Arab culture, and their future classrooms. The study concluded that the experience helped the pre-service teachers gain new knowledge, positive attitudes, and some ideas for their future diverse classrooms. It offered a great opportunity for families to explore how important it is to meet with teachers and it also empowered pre-service teachers with some powerful authentic experiences including meeting the family, sharing their knowledge, exploring their understandings, and discussing and comparing their knowledge with each other. Keywords: English Language Learners, Arabic-Speaking Families, Diversity, Preservice Teachers' Cultural and Linguistic Awareness, Culturally Diverse Families*

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

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

As an educator with some knowledge about the issues that my daughter could face in school, I was able to help her start school comfortably. However, this is not true for all parents, many of whom may lack the appropriate knowledge, or the appropriate language to support their children in school. In fact, knowledge about other cultures are not easy to learn without

the appropriate education and/or experiences. My background knowledge in the field of Education with an opportunity to conduct research in different U.S. public schools along with some other opportunities to work as a volunteer in classrooms enabled me to meet with teachers, observe classrooms, learn about other cultures, and look at the needs of students including Arabic-speaking students. Also, my knowledge as a member of the Muslim and Arab society who had a chance to visit and live in different continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America) over the past two decades enabled me to be aware of the differences that could be a challenge for students when moving to another country. Thus, educating teachers about cultural and linguistic differences is very important because parents, and their culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children, often speak different languages and have different cultural practices from their teachers. These differences may cause some difficulties that can hinder CLD students' achievement in school (Miller & Endo, 2004).

Indeed, like other English language learner (ELL) groups, Arabic-speaking English language learners (ELLs) face some consistent difficulties in their learning in American public schools. This may be because, according to Aburumuh, Smith and Ratcliffe's (2009) study, teachers lack basic knowledge about Arab and Islamic culture, including knowledge of Muslim holidays. In addition, stereotyping of Arabs is very common in America due to misunderstandings of Arabs and Arab cultures (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Kamalipour, 2000; Wingfield, 2006) and because Arab culture has been misrepresented by the media for decades (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Wingfield, 2006; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001).

Because teachers need to be able to work with and support CLD children, their preparation to do so should start in their teacher education program. This is important nowadays more than ever because the number of ELL students is growing and it is expected that in 2025, one out of every four public school students will be an English language learner (National Education Association [NEA], 2008), and yet these students are not succeeding. In fact, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2011) reported that the number of eighth grade English language learners (ELLs) below the basic level in reading achievement is very high (71%) compared to their native counterparts (22%). In addition, Terrazas (2011) reported that Arabic-speaking ELLs (ages 5 and up) make up about 40 percent of the 2 million Arabs in the U.S. In spite of these classroom demographics, many teachers lack sufficient training to support their ELLs based on the students' needs (Brisk, 2010; Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002; Gay, 2002; Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere, & Chang, 2007; Santos & Suleiman, 1993; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). In support of the idea that many teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of Arabs to teach them effectively, Akasha (2013) found that many middle school teachers (both mainstream and ESL) lack the appropriate knowledge to understand their Arabic-speaking ELL students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers in the study had never learned about Arab culture except from media sources. This lack of knowledge prevented teachers from fully supporting their students based on their needs, whether culturally, socially or linguistically. The study also found that, among other issues, most participating teachers, as a result of their limited knowledge, were reluctant to talk about students' cultures in the classroom in order to avoid any misunderstandings. However, a number of researchers have considered that knowledge of students' cultures is important for effective language teaching (Brisk, 2010; Egbert, Hanson-Smith, & Chao, 2007; Santos & Suleiman, 1993; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001).

To help educate teachers about Arab culture and language, research suggests that situated learning experiences can be used to engage learners in meaningful real-life experiences. According to the literature on situated learning, there is evidence that situated learning may help teacher-learners to learn while they interact with others in authentic contexts (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schell & Black, 1997). However, lack of research that examines the influence of teacher learning situated in Arab cultural contexts on teachers'

beliefs creates a gap in the literature that needs further investigation. Thus, this study examines the influence of learning experiences situated in Arab cultural spaces on pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings of their future Arab students. What is unique in this current study is that it is the first study that situates pre-service teachers with Arab families, from whom their culture and language are perceived as quite different (Abdo & Breen, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Al-Khresheh, 2010; Aubrey, 2009; Barros, 2003; Burt & Peyton, 2003; Miller & Endo, 2004; Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere & Chang, 2007).

To examine the influence of learning experiences situated in Arab culture on pre-service teachers' perceptions and understandings of Arab culture and language, the current study first presents what the literature says about situated learning and pre-service teachers' cultural experiences in international and local settings, followed by the research questions. It then discusses the study methodology and data collection and presents the findings according to the research questions. This is followed by conclusions and implications for future research and instruction.

## Literature Review

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

### Situated Learning

According to the literature, learning can be meaningful if it is embedded in the social and physical context within which it will be used (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989), which can provide an authentic context that reflects the way the knowledge will be used in real life (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). This does not mean that pre-service teachers can only learn about teaching at school or college; rather, they can learn from the experiences they are engaged in at the time of learning and such experience can occur at any place where the learning experience is embedded (Borko, 2004, White, 2006). This situated view of learning is supported by a number of scholars. For example, Lave (1988) argues that learning in natural settings occurs as a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it is situated. Thus, this kind of learning can provide authentic activities where the learning can be meaningful and related to the real-life situations (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). More importantly, these activities are an initial part of the learning process (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). According to situated learning theory, learning is situated when people interact in a socially and culturally structured environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In addition, situated learning provides access to expert performances such as meeting with diverse families can be a rich resource (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Gay (2002) supports this view, noting that academic knowledge and skills situated within lived experiences are more easily and thoroughly learned. Thus, situated learning theory encourages learners to learn in an environment with social interaction where multiple roles and perspectives are integrated (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Further, Choi and Hannafin (1995) define situated learning as an authentic environment that enables participants to learn from the situation they are exploring, as well as from reflection and articulation (in Herrington & Oliver, 2000).

In the above literature, a number of elements were found to be important to situated learning. These elements, such as authentic contexts, authentic activities, social interaction, access to experts, and reflections should be taken into account when situated learning is applied and evaluated (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Choi & Hannafin, 1995; Herrington & Oliver, 2000; White, 2006). In the following section, some studies that examined learning that occurred

in international and local communities are described in order to highlight these important elements of situated learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Situated Learning in Local Communities**

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

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

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

In a similar study, Vaughan (2005) examined the social and academic impact of a short cultural immersion experience on a group of 36 White and 2 African American pre-service teachers. Before the study began, the pre-service teachers were introduced to different topics about multicultural awareness in order to prepare them to move out of their comfort-zone. The participants were required to spend at least an hour with a minority group to find out how this experience can impact their cultural awareness and the knowledge they can learn for their teaching/ learning process. Data were collected through field reflections and oral discussion about the experience. Although the pre-service teachers were nervous and reluctant to participate in this study, Vaughan found that the pre-service teachers ended their experience with new understandings of how to interact positively with other cultures. This study agreed with the findings of previous investigations that it is important to enable pre-service teachers to experience being in situations where their culture and language are the minority in order to help them recognize other cultures and minorities in the classroom; he pointed out that it is difficult to understand minority children if teachers do not have an opportunity to meet people from other cultures. Vaughan concluded that this experience, based in authentic contexts and activities, contact with experts, and opportunities for feedback and reflection, provided an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to engage with cultures different from their own, which helped to change some of their fears and stereotypes they may have about other groups.

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



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

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

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

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

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

## **Research Questions**

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

at a local level in Arab family homes. Moreover, none of the previous studies included families as participants; this creates another gap in the literature. Therefore, this study includes the families as participants. Based on a pilot study (Akasha, 2013) and the literature described above, the questions for this study are:

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

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

### **Methodology**

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

### **Participants**

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

Out of the total number of 40 pre-service teachers in the two course sections, 15 pre-service teachers either signed up to participate in a different fieldwork activity or signed up and then cancelled before going to the family's home. Out of the 15 non-participants, 10 of them responded to a question about their reasons for either not participating or cancelling after signing up. Seven of them said they had had a scheduling conflict, whereas one was a "picky

eater” so she did not want to bother the family by not eating in their home. The other two cancelled their dinner because one was not comfortable going to a stranger’s house for dinner and her partner did not want to go alone (afterwards, when she heard from other participants about the experience, she felt that she had “missed such a great opportunity”). All participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study.

## Context

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

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

<b>Situated learning element</b>	<b>Situated learning activity</b>
Provide authentic context that reflects real life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An Arab home where the family goes about its daily life including cooking and hosting.</li> </ul>
Provide authentic activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interacting with the family.</li> <li>● Learning about Arab culture.</li> <li>● Practicing the Arabic language.</li> <li>● Experiencing Arab food.</li> <li>● Learning about the education system in Arab countries.</li> <li>● Exploring Arab family life.</li> </ul>
Provide multiple roles and perspectives including experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Different members of Arab families (Gender: different point of views such as males &amp; females) and other pre-service teachers</li> <li>● Previewing materials</li> <li>● Researcher's introduction to Arab families</li> <li>● Classroom readings and discussion</li> <li>● Conversation with Arab families.</li> <li>● Learning while observing Arab families’ life in their own environment.</li> </ul>
Provide opportunities for feedback and reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus group discussion</li> <li>● Discussing and comparing understanding with other teachers</li> <li>● Class reflection</li> <li>● Class feedback</li> <li>● Exploring their assumptions with experts (Arabs)</li> <li>● Connecting their knowledge to future classroom</li> <li>● Family feedback</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Situated learning elements along with activities

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

### **Data Sources and Procedures**

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

**Before the home visit.** First, teachers were given a KWLS chart (see Appendix A) to collect data about their previous knowledge (K) and the knowledge they wanted to know (W) about Arabic culture and language. This chart was designed based on the main important categories from the pilot study (Akasha, 2013) in order to help the pre-service teachers to understand some important issues about Arabic-speaking ELL students' culture and language. Initially, they were asked to complete the (K) and (W) questions only. At this point, the pre-service teachers were only instructed to complete the first two columns of the chart using their existing knowledge regarding each component in the K & W questions. Then, the chart was taken back from the pre-service teachers. These data were very useful to learn about the existing knowledge of the pre-service teachers and what they considered important. Second, in the same day, the pre-service teachers were given a hypothetical case that involved Arabic-speaking ELLs at school (see Appendix B for the case). The case was used to challenge the pre-service teachers to find solutions based on their existing understandings. The pre-service teachers individually answered three questions about the case after examining it. These data helped the researcher to understand the previous knowledge the pre-service teachers held about Arabic-speaking ELLs and elementary classrooms.

**After the home visit.** First, the pre-service teachers were given back the KWLS chart to collect information about (L), what they learned from their experience, and (S), the knowledge that they still wanted to know about Arabic culture and language. No further instructions were given except completing they were directed to complete the last two columns in the chart based on the knowledge they learned from the experience of the home visit. These data were used to learn about the knowledge they perceived that they learned and their perceptions about their experience with the Arab families. In the same day, the pre-service teachers were also given another copy of the hypothetical classroom case to find out how they understood any classroom issues after the home visit. These data addressed the knowledge that they learned from their home visit. Most important, the data helped to shed light on how teachers might use this knowledge in their future classrooms.

Third, a focus group technique was used to collect data about the home visit experience (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). For the focus groups, the pre-service teachers were divided into four sessions to make the groups manageable; each session lasted 60 minutes or less. Each group had three to six pre-service teachers. Eight pre-service teachers were not able to attend their focus group interview because of scheduling conflicts. To enable valuable discussion in each group, the participants who visited the same home were placed in different groups, except in some cases where this was not possible. Each focus group meeting took place in a private quiet room after a class session. In the focus groups, the pre-service teachers were

asked to discuss open-ended questions together. These questions were focused on issues that the pre-service teachers came across based on the other data sources. Some questions were asked such as how do you describe your experience with the family? What did you learn from the experience? Do you think this experience could help you in the future if you decided to visit your family? How do you describe your experience before and after the home visit? How can you deal with families who do not visit school during conference or some other meeting? In addition, the pre-service teachers talked about their experiences in the home visit and compared the similarities and differences among their experiences. These focus groups were audio and video recorded and notes were also taken to follow up with important issues that arose in the discussion.

Fourth, to provide additional data to support the answers to the research questions, each host family completed a survey. This survey was mainly composed of closed-ended questions to encourage participation, with some focus on open-ended questions when more detail was important. This survey was used to learn about the families' and participants' experiences, their interaction, misunderstandings, any interesting stories, and their involvement in general. The survey questions were designed to cover different topics related to the family, language and culture that could be talked about, learned, asked, and/or observed during the home visit. (see Appendix C for the survey).

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

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was an ongoing process including reflecting, organizing, and coding in order to appropriately interpret the data (Creswell, 2009). A general inductive approach was used to turn the raw data into a brief summary and to establish a clear link between the research questions and the findings (Thomas, 2006). To complete the data analysis process, the researcher first prepared the raw data by transcribing the four focus group discussions and then a native speaker read them for accuracy. Next, the researcher read through all the collected data (focus groups transcriptions, reflections, survey, KWLS chart, and classroom scenario) several times for deep understanding of the data content. This initial review of the data was very useful to determine some key points and get an overview of the main important categories. Through multiple readings, several categories appeared to be important throughout the data, all were defined to see if some categories can be combined. For example, feeling before the experience and feeling during or after the experience were combined to one theme (Feeling), then some other subthemes were added such as (fear and anxiety, openness and welcome, and enjoyment). This process was repeated while looking at the similar themes and subthemes for all other categories as they appeared in the collected data.

Then qualitative data analysis software (TAMS Analyzer 4.0) was used to organize the categories and retrieve data easily. The reflections and the focus group discussion documents were imported into the TAMS analyzer software; the identified categories were assigned to related labels of coding as they appeared while reading through the data. For example, important phrases related to the feeling of fear and anxiety were defined and added to its related category (Feeling). The coding colors for each category were so useful to look at each theme, subthemes and any other possible similarities. After that, the researcher counted the responses to the closed-ended questions of the survey to look at the data collected from the family\_based on the degree of agreement on a variety of closed-ended questions, followed by reading the open-ended questions several times for a clear understanding and coding, the same procedure was applied as described above for coding the categories. In addition, the researcher used the same categories as they appeared in the pre and post KWLS while highlighting the important segments for each category. Furthermore, the researcher read through the pre and post classroom scenario data several times for deep understanding while assigning categories to the related text in the data. This process was repeated; similar categories were combined. At this point, five main categories were highlighted as important to start the discussion; these were classroom solutions, stereotypes, feelings, interaction, and knowledge gained. Figure (2) shows the coding themes along with the subthemes used in the study. These themes were very helpful to organize the data based on each research question as explained in the discussion section below. By doing so, it is hoped that the data obtained from the study are clearly connected and related to each question of this study.

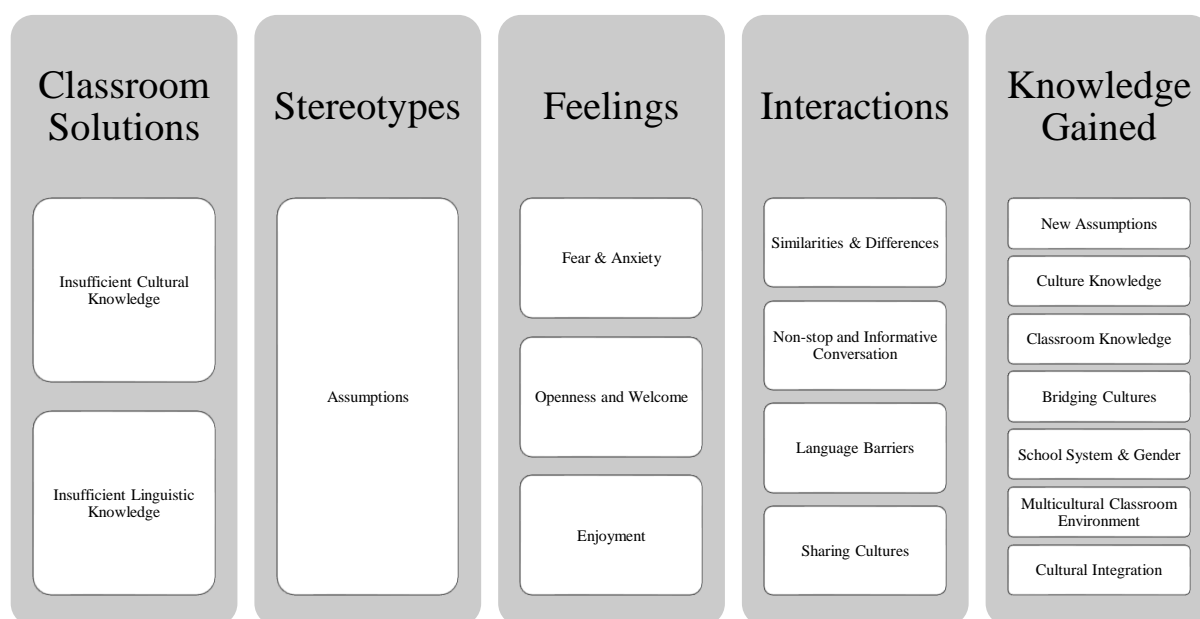


Figure 2. the coding themes and subthemes

### Credibility and Trustworthiness

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

the data analysis steps is provided, including the categories that emerged to enable clear understandings of the data analysis process and findings. Such action also can help readers to understand the analysis steps and then judge the interpretations.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was that the position of the researcher as an Arab member could have affected data interpretation. Although Arabic-speaking groups can be related to a number of sub-groups such as the participants of this study were from different sub-groups: Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Libya, this can be a challenge since my cultural and linguistic background knowledge is still related to the Arabic-speaking roots. However, feedback and comments from a colleague were very useful to avoid any bias. A second limitation was that the data from families were only collected by survey because other data collection methods such as interviews or observations were not possible. However, to mitigate this limitation, open-ended questions were used along the closed-ended questions to collect data from families and provide opportunities for them to discuss their perceptions. In addition, the researcher also was a participant, as his family was one of the Arab families in the study. This could bias the interpretations, but this participation helped the researcher to understand the experiences of the pre-service teachers in the Arab families' homes.

### **Results and Discussion**

Data analysis and synthesis revealed that the pre-service teachers perceived that their situated learning experience with Arab families affected them in different ways. To make it simple and clear, the results and discussion section is arranged based on each research question. To do that, I looked at each question carefully, examine it in relation to the themes appeared in the study, then link it to the related subthemes. This process was very helpful to start the discussion, adding the voice of the participants to support and validate the discussion. Thus, the participants' voice is included along with the discussion. To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms are used instead of real names.

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

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

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

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

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

the only one that had this vision when signing up for this dinner.” Furthermore, Kristy said, “I wanted to make sure that my clothing wasn’t offensive at all because I was under the impression that Arab women were not supposed to show any skin other than their face. I didn’t know if we would be able to communicate and understand one another.” The data indicated that all of the participants had some assumptions that caused discomfort before the experience. As Chris said, “I thought it was going to be different, like I didn’t think they were going to be so open to answer questions or allow me to put my thoughts into it.”

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

**Feelings of fear and anxiety.** The data show that all except one of the pre-service teachers were nervous before the visit because of the obvious lack of cultural knowledge. For instance, Joyce stated that, “Before going to this dinner, my exposure to this type of culture was slim to none.” This lack of knowledge made some participants feel nervous about the cultural differences. As Beth said “We were nervous about the food and then I was nervous because the cultures were so different and I was afraid to offend them in their own house.” Moreover, lack of cultural knowledge also made Chris wonder about many issues such as “Are we too early? Are we too late? Do we go right now? Do we wait in the car? Are they going to think that we are weird? Should we take off our shoes? What do we wear? We had so many questions!” Similar to Chris, Heather also faced the same situation as she said, “I was really anxious to know what kind of food they were going to have. What should I wear? What would we talk about? Would it be awkward?” In addition, one pre-service teacher (Mary) even clearly voiced that “Before this experience I might have been more apprehensive to have Arabic students in my class because I have little knowledge about their culture/background.”

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



it intentionally, but I still felt like I was walking on eggshells.” The data overall show that lack of knowledge made the pre-service teachers feel fear or nervousness before meeting the Arab families; lack of cultural knowledge appeared to be the main reason that the pre-service teachers perceived that they were "frozen like an ice cube" or "walking on eggshells."

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

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

The data clearly show the stereotypes, feelings of fear and anxiety, and lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge facing the pre-service teachers before the experience. This is in accord with Marx and Moss's (2011) findings, where cultural differences caused anxiety for the participants. However, this fear is also a crucial part of an authentic cross-cultural activity because it enables pre-service teachers to be in a similar situation as many ELLs in the classroom (FERENCE & BELL, 2004; HERRINGTON & OLIVER, 2000; WIEST, 1998; ZHAO, 2007).

### **After the experience**

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

**Feelings of openness and welcome.** According to the data, the perceptions of fear and anxiety of all of the pre-service teachers changed positively after they were welcomed by the Arab families. The data indicates that the pre-service teachers did not expect to see this kind of welcoming by Arab families. For example, in the focus group discussion, Tara said, "They were so open and welcoming and they just wanted to get to know us, which is really nice." Many others also supported the significance of the families' openness and welcome; Julie added, "I felt about the same" (openness and welcoming). Furthermore, Diane said, "Mariam and her family were all so full of love and they were so welcoming the entire visit." In her reflection about her first experience with an Arab family, Fran highlighted the moment she felt comfortable, as she said, "After just 5 minutes in their home, I felt so welcomed that I knew I would be fine." Some participants even went further to express their feelings of enough comfort

to ask questions and participate fully with the family. For instance, in the focus group discussion, Hannah said, “I was able to ask questions and I felt really welcome to ask whatever questions and I think my family felt the same way, it was really a comfortable environment.” Furthermore, Jacob realized that, “Aisha and her family were so warm and welcoming and they explained to me that a good practicing Muslim is supposed to give and help others that are less fortunate.” Finally, Penny said that “I was not afraid to ask questions as I thought might offend them because they seemed very understanding of the fact that I don’t know a lot about their culture, so they were very nice and explicit and told me stories in addition to their explanations.” This first meeting with the Arab family, at least to most of the pre-service teachers, seemed to reject their previous assumptions about Arabs. It was a moment of rethinking and creating a new image based on their own judgment, which can be very useful and helpful to the pre-service teachers about cultural and linguistic knowledge.

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

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

**Cultural knowledge.** According to the data, this situated learning experience helped the pre-service teachers to develop their cultural knowledge. Beth said, “After speaking with Issa, I now know this scarf is called a hijab and that this is done due to the religion that the Arab culture follows.” Also speaking about the hijab, Joyce said, “I want to wear one now because it’s, like, I don’t want them looking at me for what I look like, but I want them actually

looking at me for who I am and so I was just like I have more respect for it in that aspect.” In addition, Rose said, “just being in their home I learned so much about family and culture.” Moreover, the KWLS shows that eight pre-service teachers reported that they learned that Arab families are tightly knit. Beyond this, six of the pre-service teachers learned that the father is the head of the household in the Arab family. Furthermore, a number of new concepts and questions appeared to be reported by at least one pre-service teacher. For example, polygamy is allowed based on certain conditions (although it is not common), children go to school to support the family, and cousin marriage is not uncommon.

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

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

**Classroom knowledge.** The data also revealed that the pre-service teachers were able to learn about and discuss some of the difficulties with and the differences between Arabic and English. Five pre-service teachers reported that they learned that Arabic is read and written from right to left. Liz said, “I learned that Arabic is written from right to left, and that it (Arabic) is a phonetic language.” In this situated learning experience, some of the pre-service teachers

were even given an opportunity to practice the language. For example, Heather mentioned, “Serena and I were able to try writing our names in Arabic. This was very fun to learn! He also showed us their names in Arabic and a few other words.” Moreover, some participants went further to talk about other language differences. Fran said, “We had asked about the Arabic language, alphabet system, and writing system. We were told all about these topics and about how they write from right to left as opposed to left to right as we write in English.” In the focus group discussion, Penny said, “I learned a lot about Arabic, asked some questions about Arabic and then I learned about the different vowels and how it’s written.” Moreover, in her interaction with the Arab family, Fran said, “We all of us tried writing in Arabic and writing in English both from the right to left and left to right. Well, the coolest thing I learned is that we hold pencils differently.” Then, a number of new concepts appeared to be reported by at least one pre-service teacher. For example, they noted that they learned that words are written as they sound, the language is pretty and beautiful, and there are different dialects.

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

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

To sum up, it was common to find out that the pre-service teachers had many assumptions about Arabs in general before their visit. However, the data showed that they ended their learning experience with new understandings as a result of their interaction with the Arab families. Interaction with the Arab families was an opportunity to ask questions and learn about the differences. The authentic activities, reflections, and being in the context of an

Arab home helped them to explore their own assumptions and hence develop new understandings. Accordingly, the data showed that the pre-service teachers felt that their perceptions and assumptions on different topics such as cultural and classroom knowledge changed positively. This finding agrees with other studies that situated learning experiences (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) can develop cultural awareness (Lee, 2011; Marx & Moss, 2011), support positive interaction (Vaughan, 2005), and take away wrong assumptions (Ference & Bell, 2004). Similar to Lee's (2011) findings, this study suggests that situated learning experiences help pre-service teachers to learn about teaching strategies through the lens of ELLs that can be used to enhance multicultural classroom pedagogy.

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

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

**Non-stop and informative conversation.** The data show that the majority of pre-service teachers spent a good time with the Arab family in a way that they were able to influence each other positively. In her reflection, Olive said, "Once we sat down and got comfortable, the conversation was absolute non-stop." The conversation went smoothly and continuously between the two parties while they learned from each other. Nora and Olive said, "We had a constant conversation learning about one another while eating off of the tray that was prepared." This also was supported by others such as Linda and Lori, who said, "The conversation was informative and rich, where topics ranged from living conditions, to food, to politics and religion." Most important is that this interaction between the pre-service teachers and the Arab family members was perceived as meaningful because both parties had a chance to learn from each other and they had a chance to interact positively. Gloria said, "Before dinner, we were able to sit and chat with Mariam about our education and our goals for our future." In the home settings, a large number of topics were explored, some of which the participants reported were deeply discussed. Heather said, "Serena and I were very interested in what problems the students have when they come to a new school. We talked to the parents about this to get their opinion on what the student struggles with the most." In addition, Tara and Heidi said, "We felt our conversation with him was deep and allowed us insight into their culture." The conversation, in some cases, extended for a long time, which participants reported lead to a deep discussion about important topics based on their interests. For example, Jacob said, "I stayed until around 11 or so and I and Aisha's husband talked about our religions." In addition, April said, "Our night consisted of conversation about our educational aspirations and our family lives here in America." This interaction influenced one of the pre-service teachers to want to share new information with other peers; Nora said, "We had a very informational conversation about different perspectives around the world which led me to thinking about all the classes we are taking this semester. I was constantly thinking about how I could implement his words into my classrooms I am currently in and voice my knowledge from this dinner to my peers." In this regard, it is important to see how the situated learning could have an influence on the pre-service teachers' learning beyond its initial context. It is also noticeable how some pre-service teachers were successfully prepared to ask questions in order to extend their knowledge about some classroom issues.

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

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

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

This situated learning experience was also useful to the Arab families to learn about how American culture differs from their own. One pre-service teacher, Hannah said, “I really like introducing our culture, too, because I do not think they realize how diverse the difference is between southern and northern states.” In one setting, the conversation smoothly touched upon some controversial issues. However, the conversation ended up with the realization that

there was not a big difference. Jacob described this situation, saying, “We talked about the Quran and everything and a lot of the stories were very similar to the Bible, I was not really that surprised about that because I took a class on it, but I was just surprised that it was pretty much identical and my name is Arabic. I found that out and I learned how to write it.” This interaction was very useful to both groups because they perceived that they were able to understand each other, they were able to learn from each other, and they were able to see how they are similar in many respects.

In short, despite the difficulties that faced the pre-service teachers in meeting with an Arab family, this situated learning experience appeared to have enhanced their cultural awareness and enriched their understanding about Arabs. According to Hopkins-Gillis (2012), such difficulties can be useful in the cultural development of the participants, which can affect their teaching, too.

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

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

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

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

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

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

To sum up, although this situated learning experience mainly targeted pre-service teachers, families also benefited from this social interaction. First, this interaction enabled them to talk about the difficulties that their children faced in school linguistically, academically, and culturally; this information can be useful to the pre-service teachers while learning about Arabic-speaking students. Second, the families felt that it was a great opportunity for some of them to learn about U.S. culture while interacting with American teachers.

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

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

**Multicultural classroom environment.** The data show that this experience with Arab families helped the pre-service teachers to recognize how important it is to show awareness of



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

This experience was also useful to realize how important it is to accommodate other cultures in the classroom. Nora said, "I think I am more aware of differentiation throughout our society. I realize that each one of my students will come from a different background, have different values, and believe in different things, but that will help make my classroom a more diverse and multicultural place." She added, "After experiencing meeting with this family, I can apply my knowledge I made to cultures outside of my own and justify how to help meet the needs of those students in my future classroom based on their culture and background." As a result of her interaction with a Saudi family, Lori said, "she would feel more comfortable bringing the Saudi Arabian culture into her classroom." Moreover, both pre-service teachers who visited this family believed that "We would both like to tailor lessons to encompass the entire family, instead of just concerning the mother and the father, as the American culture does in lessons that require family involvement."

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

**School system and gender.** The data show that participants perceived that learning about different school systems can be useful to the pre-service teachers' classrooms. Some pre-service teachers explored things deeply as they learned about school system and gender in some Arab countries. Beth said, "I also learned that in their culture much of the schools are segregated based on gender. I found that Issa doesn't mind how the U.S school system is with regards to women and men being in the same classroom." She continued to add that "If I had the opportunity to have a student from Saudi Arabia, I would make sure that they are comfortable in the classroom first, and if possible, ask them how I can make the transition to such new surroundings easier." Kristy noted that, "The way that so much of the country is divided between men and women was eye opening. I will definitely take this knowledge with me to my classroom. It has created awareness in my mind that in addition to learning a new language, new Arab students may have a hard time adjusting to the co-ed school system that we use in the United States. It may also be extremely hard for Arab boys to adjust to having a female teacher because that is not heard of in their culture." Furthermore, Kristy said, "I will take this information into account when looking at the friendships and relationships of my students. The dynamics of relationships among cultures can vary so much that is important for

me to continue to learn about other cultures to help my students build healthy friendships with one another.” Learning about school system and gender in the Arab families’ home could add new knowledge to the pre-service teachers’ understanding that can lead to fruitful future classroom.

**Cultural integration.** The data revealed that 11 pre-service teachers felt that learning about different days and holidays was useful to enrich the classroom. Because Arabs have their own calendar (lunar calendar) year marked with holidays different from the U.S., the pre-service teachers decided to use a calendar activity in their future classrooms. For example, Julie said, “They showed us something about the calendar and how it is a little different. I think that will be really cool to have, like, if you have a kid from there or something, have that too and show the class and that was interesting.” Additionally, the pre-service teachers learned that parents could be invited to talk about their own holidays in the classroom if English is not a barrier. Fran said, “if we, as teachers, call and ask if you want to come and share about your holidays in the school and she said that was great she would never offer that on her own, she would never come into the classroom and say can I teach about my holidays. But if a teacher approached her and said do you wanna teach about your child’s holidays, she said, I would love that, I would totally do that, but she would have to be approached, so I think going out of our way to approach the parents.” Other pre-service teachers shared the same experience with their Arab families. For example, Mary and Sara said, “As teachers, we should first recognize, and then celebrate the differences in our classroom. If Ahmed’s mother came into the classroom, I’m sure there would be questions that would arise from other students that have never seen a woman dressed so modestly. Instead of ignoring the differences, we will address, educate, and celebrate cultural difference.”

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

The data also revealed that some pre-service teachers realized the importance of including the holidays of Arabic-speaking students in the classroom. Being in their home and listening to their stories about their struggles from living away from their home country, these pre-service teachers learned the importance of including the Arab holidays in the classroom. For example, Penny said, the family she visited struggled to have their kids celebrate their traditional holidays because the parents and the kids are busy in their schools all day. In addition, their traditional holidays have never been recognized in the school though they send some candies with their children in their important days. Penny then realized the importance of recognizing such traditional holidays in the classroom. Overall, the pre-service teachers perceived that the knowledge gained from this experience can help them in their future teaching. Diane expressed her perception that, “After experiencing a dinner with Mariam and her family, I have learned a great deal about their culture and how I can bring this experience into my future classroom, and have learned so much from this family.” Also, Linda and Lori said, “We both learned a lot about Saudi Arabian culture, and picked up tips ideas for making students from that part of the world more comfortable in our classrooms.”

In short, all pre-service teachers were able to interact with and learn about Arabs and suggest how they can use this limited learning opportunity to support their future students and

integrate culture into their classrooms. This finding fits with other studies that situated learning experiences can develop the cultural knowledge of pre-service teachers in a way that can affect their future teaching (FERENCE & BELL, 2004; HOPKINS-GILLISPIE, 2012; MARX & MOSS, 2011; SHARMA, AGLAZOR, MALEWSKI, & PHILLION, 2011; WIEST, 1998; ZHAO, 2007). This finding also agreed with Zhao's (2007) and Vaughan's (2005) findings that situated learning experiences help the participants to develop multicultural knowledge that appears to be useful in future classrooms.

### Conclusions

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

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

The findings of this study also agree with other studies that situated learning experiences can have an influence on what teachers do in their future classrooms provided that certain elements are taken into account, such as authentic context and activities, feedback and reflection, multiple roles, and authentic assessments (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). This current study integrated these important elements into the home-visit and course activities. Similar to other studies (e.g., FERENCE & BELL, 2004; HOPKINS-GILLISPIE, 2012; LEE, 2011; MARX & MOSS, 2011; WIEST, 1998; ZHAO, 2007), this current study also included reflections to enable the pre-service teachers to express their understandings based on what they learned from the situated learning experience (Herrington & Oliver, 2000, Meyers & Lester, 2013). In addition, the follow up focus group conversations with the pre-service teachers were really important and useful to them because everyone was telling his/her own experience with the Arab family, and therefore the focus group discussion supported the situated learning opportunity. This current study also supports the findings of Zhao (2007) that there is not a big difference whether the study takes place locally or nationally, as both contexts can provide pre-service teachers with some cultural knowledge and understanding. Yet, if it is applied locally, it is neither expensive nor time consuming. Most important, despite the differences between the Arab families and the pre-service teachers, the situated learning experience was beneficial to both groups. It offered a great opportunity for families to explore how important it is to meet with teachers and it also empowered pre-service teachers with some powerful authentic experiences

including meeting the family, sharing their knowledge, exploring their understandings, and discussing and comparing their knowledge with each other. Furthermore, this experience was also a challenge that enabled the pre-service teachers to be in a situation where English is not the native language. This kind of language barrier was very important to the pre-service teachers because it was an opportunity for them to practice the same feeling as ELLs in the classroom, yet they figured out some ways to communicate successfully.

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

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

### **Implications for Teaching**

As noted above, this study suggests that pre-service teachers should have a course or experience with local communities, one that focuses on preparing them to work with CLD children and parents. Such interaction with local communities can enable pre-service teachers to evaluate their understandings and help them to understand others better. This kind of interaction can be very useful if it follows the principles for situated learning and is supported with other activities in the classroom including, but not limited to, presentations and seminars from an expert of the targeted culture. Other activities can include attending dinner and/or other daily activities with members of the target culture. However, before applying such experience with other cultures, teachers need to be well prepared. Lack of such preparedness can hinder them from participating and interacting fully with families who might be different in many aspects. However, this study provided some powerful connections that the pre-service teachers made between their classroom learning and the experience. In addition, more visits mean more interaction, so requiring more than one visit or activity can make both groups learn from each other and have more opportunities to explore insights from the other culture.

### **Implications for Research**

Finally, there are a number of issues to be taken into account for future studies. First, this current study situated pre-service teachers in an elementary teacher education program in the home environments of twelve Arab families. Further studies may follow the teachers into

their classrooms to examine the influence of the situated learning experience on their work with diverse students as well as their communications with families. Second, situated professional development experiences with in-service teachers can be explored. In addition,

Arab culture can be slightly different from one Arab country to another. This study included three different Arab regions (Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt); however, more families from other Arab regions could be included to enrich the findings of the study and provide broader knowledge about Arabic-speaking ELLs.

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### Appendix A KWLS Chart

**Name:**

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

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



## Appendix B Classroom Scenario

**Name:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Appendix C Family Survey

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

**Instructions:** Select all that apply.

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

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

- 3) This experience helped us to understand more about American culture
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

- 4) Based on this experience, we feel **MORE** comfortable interacting with teachers in the future.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

- 5) Based on this experience, we feel **LESS** comfortable interacting with teachers in the future.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

Additional comments:

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

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

Additional comments:

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

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

Additional comments:

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

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

Additional comments:

9) This experience helped us to talk about our culture

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

Additional comments:

10) This experience helped us to talk about our language

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

Additional comments:

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

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

Additional comments:

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

12) What are some important things that you did not talk about that you think teachers should know about Arabic language and culture?

13) What did you like about this experience with pre-service teachers?

14) How can you describe your experience with the pre-service teachers in the home environment? What did you dislike?

15) What did you learn from your interaction with the pre-service teachers?

Do you have any stories that you want to share? If so, please write them below.

### Author Note

Omran Akasha received his Ph.D. Degree from Washington State University. He obtained his first degree in English Teaching from the University of Sebha, Libya. He joined the University of Sebha as a professor of ESL from 2005 to 2008. Dr. Akasha currently works with English language learners and he also teaches a curriculum and assessment course at the College of Education, WSU. His research interests include English language learners, diversity, and linguistic & cultural challenges in the classroom. Dr. Akasha can be contacted at [Omran.akasha@hotmail.com](mailto:Omran.akasha@hotmail.com).

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