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Anisa Zvonkovic Katherine A. MacTavish

I determined the perspectives of Middle Eastern mothers concerning U.S. early childhood schools using qualitative methodologies. The ecological perspective model presented by Bronfenbrenner was the ideal framework for investigating the Middle Eastern children's experiences in this study that considered the importance of the sociocultural contexts of children and their families. Six Middle Eastern mothers and five primary school teachers completed the Circle of friends’ form to understand the outline of the six Middle Eastern children’s social interactions; and also engaged in open-ended, tape-recorded interviews. Information was collected regarding children’s patterns of social interactions, teachers’ efforts for children’s social smoothness, and mothers’ and teachers’ perceptions in relation to cultural awareness in U.S. schools.

This study also examined how these six teachers followed the principles of developmentally appropriate practice recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that include being age appropriated, recognizing the children’s individual differences, and being culturally appropriated. Special attention was given to shortfall of teachers in term of immigrant parents’ participation; especially these six Middle Eastern mothers’ involvements for considering a bi-directional flow that acknowledge parents’ unique ability and knowledge in terms of cultural awareness. This
research study outlined some key elements that could be in place to facilitate collaboration between parents and teachers to foster cultural awareness in the classrooms. In addition, I envision a set of programs that could be beneficial to all children especially children of immigrants in terms of infusing diversity and carrying out true developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood schools.
Middle Eastern Mothers’ Perspectives of U.S. Early Childhood Schools

by
Shahrnaz Badiee

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APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy

Co-Major Professor, representing Human Development and Family Studies

Redacted for Privacy

Co-Major Professor, representing Human Development and Family Studies

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Shahrnaz Badiee, Author
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Middle Eastern Mothers' Perspectives of U.S. Early Childhood Schools

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2000, more than 11.5 million children in the U.S., or about one in six, were living with foreign-born parents. Over 1/3 or 35.3% of these children were under age of six (Census Bureau, 2001). It is estimated that in year 2004, 20% of the 7.5 million children age five and six enrolled in U.S. schools, will be students who are foreign-born or have foreign-born parents (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). As the population of young children of immigrants continues to grow, the need for understanding how they adjust to the U.S. early childhood school settings will grow as well. It is essential to understand how young children of immigrants adjust in early childhood settings, when their parents are from other countries and their cultural experiences are different from U.S. culture and how early childhood settings adjust to these children of immigrants.

For such children, the process of adapting to a new culture and adjusting to a new lifestyle might be stressful (McCarthy, 1998). There are challenges that all international children might experience, such as (a) cultural conflict and choosing between their parents' culture and U.S. culture (Garcia, 2001; McCarthy, 1998), (b) establishing friendships with U.S. children, as well as those of their native culture (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997), and (c) facing unfamiliar language, inappropriate curricula and instruction, and teachers who are not culturally sensitive (Berns, 2001). How children of immigrants respond to these challenges and how they adjust to their surroundings will shape their ultimate early experiences and developmental outcomes (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997; McCarthy, 1998).
The United States is a nation of immigrants. There is evidence that as early as 1770, migration to the American colonies started among people who escaped hardships at home (Gjerde, 1999). According to the Census Bureau report (2002), more than 32.5 million immigrants from over 140 different countries are living in the United States (Schmidley, 2003) and the majority of them are families with children under age of 18 (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997; McCarthy, 1998; Rumbaut, 1997). Recently, the annual number of new immigrants (legal and illegal) has been increased to about 1.5 million (Landale, 1997).

A significant percentage of such immigrants are from Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Pakistan. This mixture of immigrants is one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in America (Camarota, 2002). The records show that, by the year 2000, the population of Middle Eastern immigrants was more than 1.5 million, an increase of 80% since 1990. These statistics, however, do not include the 570,000 U.S.-born children of immigrant parents (Camarota, 2002).

Early Childhood Settings

Academic settings such as pre-schools, kindergartens, and primary schools are in charge of building children's social, emotional, cognitive, and language skills that are significant parts of their early childhood experiences. Early childhood specialists consider the early years of life as a fundamental period for shaping the child’s physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development later in life (Bradburn, 2000).

Developmentalists believe that the influences of the immigration process and acculturation mainly depend on children’s age and developmental stage (Garcia Coll &
Magnuson, 1997). Due to children’s capability of and urge for learning, young children are able to acculturate faster and easier than adults. The researchers suppose that for children, the acculturation pace is slow before the preschool years and then it speeds up after the child enters any school setting (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997). The acculturation rate of young Middle Eastern children before entry to school is the same as the acculturation rate of their family’s, however, this rate will change as they enter in to any early school system. Therefore, it is important to study the experiences of Middle Eastern children in the early childhood settings of preschool and primary school. To date, however, few researchers have focused on Middle Eastern immigrant families and their young children’s social experiences in school settings and friendship groups.

Like all children of immigrants, Middle Eastern children’s social experiences are associated with their parents’ social experiences and their perceptions. To support the healthy social development of the more than a half million Middle Eastern children that are living in the United States, it is essential to examine Middle Eastern families’ social experiences within U.S. schools. In addition, due to recent historical events such as the terrorist attack in New York City on September 11, 2001, there is a possibility that the social experiences of Middle Eastern parents and their children are not as positive as they were before that event.

Parent-teacher relationships are another influential factor in the social experiences of children of immigrant families. Professional organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children advocate for parents’ involvement; especially parents of children who have diverse cultural backgrounds. The NAEYC cites a criterion on which teachers and educators should base their curriculum:
For optimal developmental and learning of all children, educators must accept the legitimacy of children's home language, respect and value the home culture and promote and encourage the active involvement and support of all families, including the extended and nontraditional family unit. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1996a, p.5).

Collaboration with parents can be implemented through teachers, principals, and school superintendents. Teachers, however, have the most significant role in forming partnerships with parents. Teachers are responsible for developing positive relationships with parents by building trust, mutual respect, and through pen communications. There might be some challenges to developing strong relationships and connections with culturally diverse parents due to their dissimilar child-rearing practices, language difficulties, and cultural values (Berns, 2001). Teachers can break through the possible barriers by being positive, supportive, and considerate of culturally diverse parents.

Theoretical Foundation

Few theoretical frameworks and models have been established for studying the experiences of culturally diverse children and families. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Perspective (1986) presents an appropriate framework for investigating culturally diverse children's experiences. The ecological perspective considers the importance of the sociocultural contexts of children and their families. According to human development researchers, there are internal and external factors for children who experience acculturation (Sodowsky & Lai, 1997). Individual characteristics such as age, gender, temperament, cognitive development, and other developmental stages are important internal factors in children's acculturation experiences. External factors such as community and neighborhood composition, parental reactions to acculturation, family
background, and the larger cultural contexts, such as school, contribute as well to how children experience acculturation (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997; McCarthy, 1998).

Purpose

The main goal of this study is to have a better understanding of Middle Eastern families and children's experiences in U.S. school settings. The other important purpose is to accumulate valuable information for assisting families from other countries. In addition, this study provides useful information for teachers working with Middle Eastern children. Due to lack of formal research available on Middle Eastern immigrants, there is an essential need to examine the context of immigration for children of Middle Eastern immigrant and their families in future immigration studies.

Furthermore, relying on The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) principles for Developmentally Appropriate Practices in early childhood programs, not only can teachers employ their knowledge about child development and what is known about each child's individual interest, strengths and needs, but also teachers can utilize their knowledge about the social and cultural contexts in which children live. This way each child's learning experiences are meaningful, applicable, and respectful (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Therefore, this study focuses on how early childhood school settings foster culturally sensitive curricula in their classroom and school activities.

Research Questions

This study focuses on Middle Eastern families and their children's experiences in U.S. school settings. The research questions guiding this research study are as follow:

(1) How do Middle Eastern mothers perceive their child's social experiences in U.S.
early childhood settings?

(2) What are the mothers’ and teachers’ perceptions concerning the teachers’ attempts for cultural awareness?

Information on children’s social experiences and teachers’ attempts to gain cultural awareness are gained through mother and teacher interviews. In addition, the level of children’s social interactions and friendships in and out of school environment are considered, as well as, the parents and teachers attempts to smooth children’s social experiences. The levels of teachers’ awareness concerning cultural and family ethnic values, especially for the Middle Eastern culture, were also examined.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The ecological perspective was selected for the theoretical model of this research study. This Chapter outlines how Middle Eastern mothers view U.S. early childhood schools in terms of their children’s social interactions within the ecological context. A review of the literature specific to children of immigrants and their social and emotional development concludes this chapter.

Theoretical Framework:

The Ecological Perspective

The ecological perspective identifies the child as the center of the model. The person-process-context model maintains that the personal characteristics of a child can be critical to positive or negative outcomes in child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Furthermore, to provide readers an overview of early childhood development, the psychological developmental theory and information that are related to children’s growth and progress were considered.

Child Development

The theory of development established by Erikson discusses the children’s internal and the external aspects. The internal psychological factors include age, gender, temperament, personality, talent, and intensity. This theory stresses that the internal personological processes are the most significant factors upon individual development (Baltes, Resse, & Lipssit, 1980). For children the external social factors include family background, larger cultural context such as community and neighborhood, school, and peers. These internal and external factors are related to child’s personality, such as ways of learning about their environment and their world (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).
Child's Social Context

The ecological perspective emphasizes that children and their environment need to be studied as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner expressed that the child’s experiences are a set of nested structures for which each experience is entrenched within the next (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Therefore, children’s environments should be analyzed from different levels of the microsystems (such as, family, school, neighborhood, and religious settings) to the macrosystems influences (such as, cultural values, political systems, and social settings) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Each level of a child’s social world has important effects on other levels, as well as being affected by them. The social settings that have the most direct effects on the daily lives of five to seven year old Middle Eastern children living in the United States include family, school, neighborhood, and the mosque (Figure 1). For immigrant families, the factors listed below have been identified as central to shaping daily experiences across cultures.

Family Factors

From an ecological perspective, development of children in the family occurs through interpersonal interactions of child and parents. According to Bronfenbrenner, the microsystem of family is the most important setting in a child’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The microsystem of the family is influenced by numerous factors that include:

- Family characteristics:
  - Family ties in the United States. Having extended family members and relatives in the U.S. is a “backbone” for immigrant parents. These family members can provide information, social network, and other opportunities, especially to new immigrants
(Landale, 1997).

- Time in the United States. The longer immigrants live in U.S. the more they expand their family network and friendship ties (Buriel & De Ment, 1997).

- Spiritual beliefs. Immigrant families who believe in the power of faith and inner strength can practice and share their traditions by providing emotional support, social resources, friendship, and leadership for families with the same religion (Williams-Gray, 2001).

- Socioeconomic statuses of family. Parental education and employment have strong positive effects on family and children’s outcomes (Rumbaut, 1997).

- Family interactions and social contact. The level of immigrant families’ social relations with neighbors, friends, and other society members has significant correlation with their social isolation and stress (Siantz, 1997).

• Family and cultural stresses. Stress can cause parents emotional responses such as anxiety, sadness, and guilt have been found to be important (Jalali, 1996).

• Family’s feeling of isolation. Separations from native social associations also founded vital (Jalali, 1996). Social studies suggest those immigrant parents who lack social supports, and are livings in isolation, with combination of stress have higher risks for depression (Siantz, 1997).
Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner’s ecological Model applied to Middle Eastern children

Key: Microsystem  Exosystem  
Mesosystem  Macrosystem
School Factors

The microsystem of school is another essential contributor to children’s development. Berns (2001) described school as a socializing agent that provides, “the intellectual and social experiences from which children develop the skills, knowledge, interest, and attitudes that characterize them as individuals” (p.227). In the microsystem of school the teachers’ responsibilities as adult role models include providing opportunities, training skills, and promoting children’s development (Berns, 2001). The microsystem of the school also has significant influence on young children of the Middle Eastern immigrant. The important influential factors in the microsystem of the school include:

- National and state laws and policies. For example, policies that affect immigrant students, such as developing bilingual programs and providing ESL classes for children of immigrants.

- School and classroom quality. For instance, the classrooms’ dynamic, how multiethnic and multicultural the schools are, and whether they own culturally meaningful materials.

- Teacher’s impacts. These include the teachers’ views and attitudes toward the achievements of children of immigrants, the teachers’ engagement with children of immigrants, their knowledge of social and cultural experiences of the children, their ability to teach in culturally relevant ways, and how they facilitate children’s capability to build cognitive skills.

- Teacher/parent interactions and relationships. The roles of the teacher in making parents feel like “partners, not competitors or strangers” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The optimal goals of school for all children, including children of immigrants
include: developing positive leadership, mutual trust between children and teachers, and demonstrating high values for immigrant students' culture and language (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The interactions between child, family, and school are essential for the best possible socialization for children, especially children from diverse ethnic groups. The intention of these connections is to promote social smoothness for children. Parents, teachers and other adults are able to smooth children's social experiences by providing more social interactions and opportunities (Berns, 2001).

Cultural awareness is another vital responsibility of school leaders and teachers. In 1987 when the NAEYC issued the first Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, the definition proposed that a developmental appropriate program should be "age appropriate" and "individually appropriate". Ten years later in 1997, the NAEYC issued a revised definition of Developmentally Appropriate Programs and added the third criteria of "culturally appropriate" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Children of immigrants come from cultural backgrounds and family values that differ from the predominate society. Therefore, it is a fundamental challenge for early childhood teachers to understand their various ethnicity and heritage. Respect for cultural and ethnic differences requires teachers to be sensitive to and be familiar with children's traditions (Berns, 2001). Relying on NAEYC philosophy, teachers are guided to respect and value the immigrant children's culture and encourage the active involvement of their families (NAEYC, 1996a). Thus, by assimilating all children's families and their cultures into teachings programs, children of immigrants are able to have more understanding about their cultural values (Berns, 2001; Gordon & Browne, 2000). In addition, by involving immigrant parents in educational
curriculum, all children can extend their knowledge about other language, heritage, and ethnic groups.

**Neighborhood Factors**

Neighborhoods and communities have influences on how children and adolescents develop (Blyth, 2001). Young children of immigrants aged five to eight are starting to be active in their neighborhood by participating in play groups, neighborhood sports, and other neighborhood gatherings. The neighborhood factors for that particularly influence immigrant children include:

- Neighborhood ties. These ties can provide extensive support, resources, and information for young children of immigrants (Buriel & De Ment, 1997).
- Community effects. Communities provide protection for the development of the immigrant children. In addition, the community can foster collaboration among children and their families, support systems, role modeling, and brokering (Garcia, 2001).

**Religious Setting Factors**

The mosque is a religious setting for the majority of Middle Eastern immigrants. Statistics suggest that 73 percent (about 1.1 million) of all Middle Eastern immigrants are Muslims (Camarota, 2002). One-third of Muslim immigrants believe that they have become more religious in the United States, because of their closer ties with Muslim families. These immigrant families accentuate their customs and faith by spending more time at the mosque and other Muslim families. For these religious Muslim families, the mosques are the most important social support system in the United States. Research studies on immigrant Muslims, however, indicated that the proportion of Muslim families who follow the laws of Islam is about equal to numbers of families who do not follow
them and are not strongly religious (Pipes & Duran, 2002). Therefore, for those families who are not religious, the microsystem of religious settings is not that essential.

Mesosystem

The interrelation and linkages between the child and surrounding microsystems take place through the mesosystems (Figure 1). Bronfenbrenner defined the mesosystem as a "set of interactions between two or more settings in which the developing person [child] becomes an active participant." (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 209) In addition, Bronfenbrenner (1986) stressed that the child’s developmental stages that are happening in different microsystems settings are reliant on each other. For example, the circumstance of home can affect the child’s processes at school and vice versa.

Parents’ attitudes toward education and their children’s achievements in school, their relations with school leadership and teachers are influential factors in the mesosystem of family and school (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The relationship in terms of parent/teacher communication is very essential for young school aged children. The more positive linkage between the family and school the more support the child receives. Having a strong relationship between school and parents can support children’s growth in all domains of development. Several research studies have examined the relationship between the microsystems of family and the microsystems of school, and how the relationship between these two settings can affect children’s behaviors and developmental skills (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Furthermore, the influence of the mesosystem on the child depends on the quality and quantity of the interactions (Berns, 2001). According to researchers, low parental interactions and involvement are significantly correlated to young children’s lack of
enthusiasm, social incompetence, and apprehensiveness (Siantz, 1997). Parents’ involvement is one of the best ways to create the fundamental rapport between parents and teachers. Many research studies have confirmed that parents’ involvement is more influential than other factors (such as socioeconomic status of family) on children’s development (Berns, 2001).

Early childhood educators need to work on building collaborative partnerships with parents. This partnership requires mutual respect, cooperation, and two-way communication. The positive partnership requires that teachers make parents feel like they are partners, not outsiders, and it is the parents’ responsibility to communicate concerns and difficulties to teachers (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002).

*Exosystem*

The exosystem consists of the settings that influence the developing child; such as, the external networks, community structures, and communication systems (Figure 1). Most importantly, the influence of family occurs in other settings in which parents live their lives such as the parents’ world of work, circle of friends, and their social networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). For immigrant parents, vital factors that affect their mesosystem include learning the language, finding an adequate job, being compared with U.S. coworkers, developing friendships with U.S. people, feeling isolated from their own culture, and dealing with discrimination (McCarthy, 1998).

*Macrosystem*

Influencing all other systems is the macrosystem. The macrosystem includes political systems and strategies, social conditions, cultural values, nationality, and economics (Figure 1). Bronfenbrenner referred to the macrosystem as the, “consistency
observed within a given culture or subculture in the form and content of its constituent micro-, meso-, and exosystems, as well as any belief system or ideology underlying such consistencies.” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 258) For example, all children in U.S. schools are influenced by the democratic ideology. In addition, the children of immigrants are affected by their macrosystems of ethnicity and cultures (Berns, 2001). Government policies for immigrants are another fundamental macrosystem for immigrant families.

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical framework, this study focused on the Middle Eastern child and parent perspectives and their experiences in their ecological environment. Although, the other levels of the microsystems of Middle Eastern children’s environments are essential in shaping their daily experiences and sociocultural contexts, this study primarily focused on the child as the focal point and the microsystems of the family and school, and the interrelation and linkages between the two microsystems.

There are two extant models in the literature by Laosa and Chud that have been established specially for culturally diverse children and their families. These were not used to guide the study’s theoretical framework because Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model allowed a better opportunity to place the school setting centrally into focus. In addition, neither of the models has been validated by empirical research. They are broad and include all international and refugee immigrant children from all countries around the world, who came to the United States with their families, or as individuals that did not allow for sufficient focus on the Middle Eastern families proposed for this study.

Chud’s model (1982) talks about “the beginning of something new” for the children of immigrants. He noted that whenever the host culture meets the immigrants’ culture there is going to be a turning point, which he referred to as a threshold. The
essential meeting point for immigrant children and the children of immigrants is how the child interacts with two cultures and how the child can move from one culture to another (Booth et al., 1997)

Laosa (1989) has established a second model that explains how immigration affects children and their families. Laosa's model describes a metaphor of filters that recognize or control the effect of events (such as historical events), and the interactions of variables that will interfere with child's stress, adaptation, adjustment, and development over the time. These interaction variables contain the characteristics of sending and receiving community (Booth et al., 1997). Laosa's model, however, was the only theoretical approach that tried to explain the effect of immigration on children's developmental outcomes (Booth et al., 1997).

Background

Immigrant Families and Children of Immigrants

To date, there is a lack of empirical literature available about the process of adaptation of immigrant families (McCarthy, 1998; Rumbaut, 1997). In addition, there is insensitivity to the well-being of children of immigrants and their families (McCarthy, 1998). Although there is a vast population of immigrants in the United States, and a great deal has been established about their numbers and origin, little is known about their experiences and adaptation to U.S. culture (Booth, Crouter, & Landale, 1997). After the terrorist attack on September 11, there have been some Middle Eastern studies that are focusing on assimilation and incorporation of Middle Eastern families into U.S. society (Camarota, 2002). Thus far, there are no empirical studies on the affect of U.S. culture on Middle Eastern families and their children.
Most research on the children of immigrants combines generational status, including the first-generation, second-generation, and even third-generation of children in a same category (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). This can be a major practical mistake because the experiences of the newly arrived children are unique from those of U.S.-born children. The definitions of “immigrant children” and “children of immigrants” are not clear in many research studies. “Immigrant children” precisely means a foreign-born child who immigrated to the U.S. and is not U.S.-born second generation. “Children of immigrants” refers to both foreign-born and U.S.-born children whose parents are foreign-born and immigrants. The experiences of these two groups are different, however, they share a common aspect that is, having immigrant parents (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

The majority of past research on international families has focused primary on adults. Children have been treated as attachments to their parents rather than being viewed as separate subjects (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997). The general thought is that children adjust to U.S. culture more easily and faster than their parents. Children are younger, more impressionable, and exposed more to the new culture through their peer, teachers, and school relations (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997).

For children, however, adapting to a new culture and adjusting to a new lifestyle can be stressful (McCarthy, 1998) and might increase negative behaviors and problematic peer relationships (Siantz, 1997). There are additional challenges that international children might have to face when they attain higher grades. For example, these children might develop cultural conflict with their parents’ native traditions and customs. They may possibly feel that they have to choose between their parents’ culture or U.S. culture.
learned from their peers in school (Garcia, 2001; McCarthy, 1998). At the same time, children of immigrants must work to establish friendships with U.S. children, as well as those of their parents’ native culture (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Lastly, children of immigrants are facing possible discrimination and racial prejudice from teachers, neighbors, and possibly other members of society that they are exposed to (McCarthy, 1998). For Middle Eastern children these cultural stresses can be more severe, due to recent historical events and political issues.

Problems in parental behaviors can cause behavioral problems in children. As Spencer (2001) mentioned, “Parental characteristics, behaviors, and relationships provide important feedback and set expectations” (Spencer, 2001, p. 58). For example, researchers have established that behavioral problems in children can be related to family stress (Siantz, 1997).

Stress is one of the most important influences on immigrant parents’ behavior that eventually affects the quality of parent-child relationships (McCarthy, 1998). Cultural stress can be an important issue that immigrant parents face when beginning to live in the United States. Cultural stresses include emotional responses such as anxiety, sadness, guilt, nervousness, and behavioral responses like violence, and psychosomatic symptoms such as pains and aches (Jalali, 1996). Furthermore, the immigrant families might feel segregated from their native social associations, such as their immediate family that live far away, old friends, and childhood neighbors (Jalali, 1996).

Furthermore, there are intergenerational conflicts between parents and children for many immigrant families. These differential experiences and expectations are not excessively influential on preschoolers. For young school age children, however, they can
create generation gaps and can shape parents and child relationships (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997; McCarthy, 1998).

**Children’s Social and Emotional Development**

For young children age five to seven, the microsystem of family has the most significant impact on their social development (Berns, 2001). From an ecological perspective, it is important to consider the social growth of children beyond microsystem of family. Social development for children is defined as “behavior that is influenced by the understanding of others’ feelings and intentions, and the ability to respond appropriately” (Berns, 2001, p. 320). Children start to develop their social relations very early in infancy. As they grow, their social skills and opportunities to interact expand. When children get older their relations change from only interacting with their families to connecting with school peers, neighbors, and other members of their society. At this critical stage of early childhood, children start to develop their sense of belonging, their personal identity and they begin to become acquainted with their surroundings, as well as increasing their sense of trust, independence, and competence (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002).

Peer relationships and belonging to peer groups is one of the basic human needs. When children attend school, they spend many hours of their day with peers in the classroom, playground, and school bus (Berns, 2001). Past research on children’s development has indicated that children who have good relationships with their peers in school excel more in schoolwork and in later life. In their relationship with their peers, children of immigrants like all other children learn numerous skills, such as approaching others, two-way communication skills, problem solving, negotiating skills, and sharing skills (Buzzelli, 2000).
For children of immigrants and Middle Eastern children their relationships with peers at school are associated with their ability to speak English (McCarthy, 1998). In addition, the child’s level of social interaction, parents’ involvement, and dissimilarities in cultural values, are important factors in Middle Eastern children’s social interactions. Therefore, it is vital to identify the areas of social interaction, the patterns of social interactions, and the social barriers of the Middle Eastern children who are attending U.S. schools.

As the literature on children’s social development stresses, it is very important for children to develop strong social skills. For immigrant children, the school setting is a vital site for such relationships. A research study needs to be constructive and provides some answers to the questions of how Middle Eastern mothers perceive their children’s social experiences in U.S. early childhood settings. This study also needs to obtain teachers’ and parents’ perspectives on their children’s social development, in particular friendship, as well as detail about the school microsystem in terms of its encouragement of cultural awareness.

In this study, the major research questions are: what are the mothers’ perception concerning their children’s attempts for cultural awareness, and what are the teachers’ viewpoints about considering children’s cultural values in their curricula.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study was guided by the literature on immigrant children and the ecological perspective. In order to obtain Middle Eastern immigrant families' perspectives, this research study employed a qualitative approach. Through in-depth interviews, a better understanding was gained regarding the children and families' experiences in their process of adaptation to the new U.S. school settings. Descriptive information using a quantitative approach (e.g., age, marital status, education, and family size) was also obtained. This chapter presents the study design and the methods that were applied to conduct interviews with Middle Eastern mothers to obtain their perceptions of their children's U.S. school settings. In this section, the participants in the study are described and an outline of how the data were analyzed is presented.

Study Design

As part of study design and to have a better understanding of Middle Eastern children's social interactions in and out of school environment, mothers of six children were interviewed. In addition, to be certain of children's social interactions with their peers, the children's teachers also were interviewed. Furthermore, to outline the children's social interactions, the mothers and teachers participated in this study were asked to fill the "Circle of Friends" form. Observation of children's home and classroom environment were conducted. These measures are detailed below.

Participants

Sample Criteria

Berg's guide to qualitative research states that a rationale for a study population must be developed, and this rationale must include a specific and workable community
location, as well as a specific data collection site (Berg, 2001). Therefore, to obtain a rich sample the following criteria were utilized: (a) access to Middle Eastern families with young school aged children who were willing to participate, (b) availability of teachers with Middle Eastern students, and (c) a high probability for developing rapport with mothers and teachers. Due to suspicion of foreigners to an unfamiliar researcher, proximity for interviewing and rescheduling interviews, and to have a better access to schools, a small college town and a central city suburban location in northwest Oregon were chosen for the best possible locations. Three of the families were recruited from a suburban central city and three of them were selected from a small college town.

Due to the age of children and limitations of interviewing young children, mothers were interviewed. This project focused on the children’s experiences through the mothers’ perspective. In addition, mothers’ and teachers’ perceptions of the children’s social interactions in U.S. schools were of interest. To have a better understanding of Middle Eastern children’s social interactions in U.S. school settings and peer’s relations, and have more information about teachers’ attempt to introduce cultural diversity, the teachers were interviewed as well.

When using qualitative methods in a research study, it is critical to understand the culture of the subjects, especially when the culture is different from the predominate culture. In addition, the researcher’s familiarity with the people being studied and awareness of routines can smooth the progress of rapport (Berg, 2001). Being from Iran positioned the investigator to maximize her knowledge and understanding of Middle Eastern culture. For this reason, purposive sampling was employed to select the families. This method of sampling is recommended when, “researchers use their special
knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population” (Berg, 2001, p. 32). In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate subjects. First, the three Iranian families with the related characteristics were identified; they were asked them for the name of Middle Eastern friends, relatives, or neighbors who might be willing to participate in this study.

**Language**

The six Middle Eastern mothers involved in this study were from four different countries. Two mothers’ native language was Arabic and one was Urdu. The investigator was unable to talk in Arabic or Urdu; therefore, those mothers were interviewed in English. The three Iranian mothers’ native language was Persian (Farsi). Although able to talk fluently in Persian (Farsi), to ease transcribing, the investigator requested Iranian mothers to talk in English. Two of the mothers agreed and one of them asked to talk in Persian. This interview was translated by the investigator into English.

**Description of the sample**

This research study required children to be U.S.-born; therefore, the families were not new arrivals. In addition, to clarify families’ cultural values, both parents were from Middle East. The six Middle Eastern families who were selected for the sample had children in primary schools. All families were Muslim, however, there was variability in being Shiite or Sunni. Three families were from Iran, and three families were from Syria, Jordan, and Pakistan. The sampling of countries was intentional to include diversity in country and culture of parental origin.

**Mothers**

This sample totaled six mothers. As Table 1 shows, the age of the mothers varied
between 29 and 41 years. All of the mothers in this sample were married and had two to three children. All mothers were born in their native countries and came to U.S. as adults. The mothers had been living in the U.S. ranging from eight to 17 years. Two of the mothers were homemakers, one owned her business, and the other three were college graduate students (See Table 1). Two of the mothers had a high school diploma, one had a Baccalaureate degree, and three had Masters Degrees (two achieved their degree from U.S. universities and two attained theirs from their native countries). Due to being more religious, three of the mothers did wear traditional Muslim clothing which was a long dress with a head cover.

**Children**

Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of the six selected Middle Eastern children who were attending Oregon primary schools. Four of the children were kindergartners and two were first graders. Four were attending public schools and two were attending private schools.

**Teachers**

The sample totaled five teachers of the six selected children whose mothers were interviewed. The initial study design was to interview the six teachers of the six selected Middle Eastern children, however, one teacher did not agree to be interviewed. The years of experience of the teachers ranged from 12 to 20 years.

**Recruitment**

Six Middle Eastern mothers were recruited through word-of-mouth and asked directly to participate in this research study. All mothers were asked through a phone call if they were interested in participating. It was explained that the purpose of the study is to
have a better understanding of Middle Eastern families and children's experiences in U.S. school settings. They were informed that the study was designed to learn more about Middle Eastern children's social interactions and relationships with their school peers. A mother's and a teacher's cover letter (found in Appendix A1 and A2) were given to the participants prior to the interview.

Two of the mothers asked for a copy of the interview questions before the interviews to make sure the questions would not be too personal. One of the teachers also requested that the interview questions be described over the phone. The types of questions were described to mothers and teachers. The participants were aware that they were free to not answer a particular question if they did not feel comfortable, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In addition, each mother was asked to complete the background information sheet to increase acquaintance of participants (See Appendix C). Participants also received an explained of informed consent and confidentiality. Prior to the interview, mothers and teachers completed an informed consent document (See Appendix B1 and B2).

**Procedures**

The data were collected from mother and teacher interviews. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and were tape-recorded. The semistructured and focused interviews were designed to allow participants more freedom and to allow probes beyond the standard questions (Berg, 2001). Interviews were transcribed verbatim; two of the mothers' interviews had some minor grammatical changes due to English being their second language. As part of the interview protocol, observation of the body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, rate of delivery, emotional interactions, etc. were noted.
Table 1
Mothers Characteristics (N = 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Native Country</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Years of Living in U.S.</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>Islam/ Shiite</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
<td>Florist (Own business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>Islam/ Shiite</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>Islam/ Shiite</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Ph.D. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Islam/ Sunni</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Islam/ Sunni</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Ph.D. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Islam/ Sunni</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>Master Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2
Children’s Characteristic (N = 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child's Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Number of Siblings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laylee</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>Central City</td>
<td>1 younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anosh</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>Central City</td>
<td>1 older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reza</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>College Town</td>
<td>1 older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozra</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>Private School</td>
<td>Central City</td>
<td>2 older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amir</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Private School</td>
<td>College Town</td>
<td>1 younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>College Town</td>
<td>1 older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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Interviews

Interviews took place in participants' place of choice. Four of the mothers’ interviews were completed in the family’s home, one was arranged in a friend’s home, and one was completed in a conference room in a local university. Each mother was engaged in an open-ended interview focusing upon her child’s experiences in U.S. school settings. The interviews took approximately one to one and half-hours to complete.

Mothers were asked to fill out the background information sheet in relation to their family demographics. Participants were asked a standard set of open-ended interview questions that focused on their child’s experiences in school settings. Mothers were asked to reflect on their personal experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward early childhood settings. The protocol can be reviewed in Appendix D1.

In addition, mothers were requested to fill the Circle of Friends’ form for their child’s school peers (See Appendix E1). The fathers were not requested to participate in this study, however, one of the fathers made inquiries to review the interview questions and participated for the most part of the interview, and in some occasions the mother asked for his opinion in their native language. For the interviews that took place in the family home, the investigator observed for cultural symbols and cultural décor to see how culturally traditional the families were. As a thank you gift, each mother received a children’s book.

Teachers

Five teachers of the six selected Middle Eastern children were interviewed. The teachers were asked to participate in the research study through e-mails and phone calls. Prior to interviewing teachers, mothers were asked to give me permission to contact the
child's teacher. Teachers were told that the mothers have given permission to obtain some information about the children's social interactions at school and other related information. One teacher, however, requested a written permission slip from the family. As mentioned before, one of the teachers refused to participate in this study. Like all other teachers, she had been contacted via e-mail and phone calls. In addition, the investigator went to her classroom to meet her personally. In spite of these attempts, the teacher did not agree to participate.

The five teachers also were engaged in an open-ended interview focusing on children's social interactions, friendship, and relationship with school peers. The teachers' protocol can be reviewed in Appendix D2. Teachers were requested to fill the Circle of Friends' forms as well. Four of the teachers' interviews were administrated in the schools that the six selected children were attending, and one interview was arranged in a conference room in a local university. The interview took approximately 30 to maximum of 60 minutes, due to the teachers' availability and schedule. As a thank you gift, each teacher also received a children's book.

Comparing Mothers' and Teachers' Responses

Mothers' and teachers' Circle of Friends' forms were compared to see how sociable the children were, whether they had many friends or not, and who were the children's closest friends. Additionally, the mothers' and teachers' interview replies were compared regarding their attempts to smooth children's social interactions in and out of the school environment, cultural awareness opportunities provided by teachers, and the teachers efforts to include parents in their cultural awareness curricula.
Confidentiality

Informed consent forms approved by the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board were presented to each participant. These forms explained the benefits and the possible risks associated with participating in this research project. It was very essential that the confidentiality of the participants for this study was protected and the interviewees were clear about their privacy.

Records of participation in this research project were kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University (IRB) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research at any time. It is possible that these records could contain such information that the participant could be identified. Consent forms are not kept with the interview scripts. The transcripts of interviews do not contain the participants real name; rather, they are identified by a pseudonym (made-up name).

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed into a word processing program for the purpose of a filing system, then into written text for analysis purposes. Data included the mothers’ interview transcripts, teachers’ interview transcripts, field notes taken on participants’ observation, the mothers’ Circle of Friends’ forms, and the teachers’ Circle of Friends’ forms. A file was created for each child that included the background demographic data about the family, the country they were from, the family size, etc. This folder also contained the transcripts of the interview of the mother, the interview of the teacher, and any field notes about the child observed in the classroom and the home. As the data was analyzed, the information about children were compared in terms of how social they
seemed to be, as well as according differences between mothers’ and teachers’ reports regarding the teachers’ attempts for social smoothness and cultural awareness.

The method of data analysis for this qualitative study was the interpretative research approach; the goal which requires the use of primary data. As Berg (2001) suggested, “Researchers with a more general interpretative orientation are likely to organize or reduce data in order to uncover patterns of human activity, action, and meaning” (p. 239). There were no secondary data collected or analyzed. The focus was on collecting the information, examination of data, and comparative analysis.

Transcripts were interpreted relying upon the ecological framework. Coding occurred after reading and annotating of codeable topics, themes, and issues. This way, the patterns in the microsystems of family and school were identified and categorized into codes. For instance, each child’s level of social contact and interaction in and out of school based on his or her mother’s and teacher’s perceptions were considered. To be consistent with this aspect, parents’ social interactions and to what extent they allowed their children to socialize with their school peers out of school’s environment was explored. In addition, mothers’ perceptions of teachers’ efforts to introduce cultural differences was coded. The teachers’ report of their efforts to familiarize children with cultural differences and their attitude toward the importance of cultural awareness were coded as well.

In keeping with coding processes, subcodes within codes to identify the related topics in the data were established. For instance, what curricula and methods of teaching teachers have used for cultural awareness, and how often throughout the academic year they introduced different cultures to children was noted. The themes were categorized
based on the research questions and the ecological model aspects. Coding the themes and subjects eased the processes of labeling, organizing, and sorting out the data.
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

To familiarize readers with the Middle Eastern children’s social interactions at school, I organized this chapter around three broad themes, (a) mothers’ and teachers’ perceptions of children’s social behaviors and interactions; (b) how well the teachers were accommodating the children’s social needs based on their knowledge and familiarity of each child; and (c) examining teachers’ attempts to introduce Middle Eastern cultural values by comparing mothers’ and teachers’ perspectives concerning cultural awareness in school curriculum. It is important to mention that teachers’ interviews occurred on the last week of school. Therefore, the teachers could be expected to be familiar with children, their families, and their individual characteristics. Moreover, through parents’ and teachers’ responses, I was able to illuminate how well teachers knew the child in the school’s environment, the level of family interactions and children’s individual relations in and out of school, as well as mothers’ perceptions about the importance of cultural awareness in early years of school.

Children’s Level of Social Interaction

The Middle Eastern children in this study, like all other children, had individual patterns of social interaction ranging from shy to very outgoing. Based on the mothers’ and teachers’ perspectives of each child’s social interactions, (assessed via the Circle of Friends’ forms) the social contacts of these six children ranged from high to low contact with peers (see Figure 2). Consistently, there were similarities among the mothers’ and teachers’ responses concerning children’s social behavior. For each individual child, both mother and teacher solidly ranked the child’s social interaction in a comparable range. Figure 2 demonstrates the mothers’ and teachers’ viewpoint of children’s social
interactions, showing that mothers’ perspectives and teachers’ perspective were identical. Jamal’s teacher’s perspective is not available.

Because teachers’ and mothers’ responses about children’s social interaction matched, it is clear that the teachers in this research study were very well acquainted with the individual social behaviors of their students. Despite having many students (especially for teachers in four public schools), they knew each child splendidly. All the teachers had no difficulties talking about individual children’s social interactions and describing in details how they interact with their peers in the school environment. For instance, one of the teachers had a friendship chart that identified her student’s friends and the consistency of their friendship over the school year. Another teacher showed the child’s seat in her classroom and talked about the children the child had the most interactions with.

The six Middle Eastern children who participated in this study, ranged from shy to outgoing. Laylee was as an example of the most outgoing child (See Appendix F). Laylee’s teacher described her as a very friendly, outgoing, and helpful child who loved to do little tasks. Laylee’s mother also agreed that she was vastly social and made friends easily. “I know Laylee and wherever she goes, she makes friends. She has more friends than I do. I am sure she has no problem with that at school.” Laylee’s mother stated that she did not know many of Laylee’s friends because they had experienced a household move to the suburban location where they resided at the time of the interview. Also, because the mother worked full-time in her own business, she reported that she was not too involved in her child’s class.
At the other end of the continuum, there was Ozra, a very shy child (See Appendix F). According to Ozra’s mother and teacher, she was an excellent student but very quiet. Her teacher, however, believed “sometimes she can be real quiet where she just sits and does nothing and just watches everyone, other time she gets up and participates.” The mother’s perception of her school social interactions was the same as the teacher’s. Ozra’s mother believed due to her shyness, “it takes her a long time to be social with her friends.” Ozra’s teacher and mother both were agreed that she was a very quiet girl who only felt comfortable interacting with people she knew and she became very shy around people that she did not know. In addition, Ozra’s mother clarified that they had many family members such as aunts and cousins who lived nearby so that Ozra hardly socialized with other children. When it came to her comfort zone, the teacher also agreed that Ozra felt more contented around her cousin who attended the same school.

Anosh was in the middle of the continuum for being social (See Appendix F). As reported by his teacher, in addition to the fact of being “a typical kindergarten boy, [who] mostly played with other boys and had lots of boy friends in the class,” he was popular among his classmates and, “lots of kids loved to play with him.” During the interview, his teacher talked about him being friendly, outgoing, and social.

It appeared that Anosh’s teacher viewed him as a social and moderate high contact child. She mentioned, “If one friend is busy doing something, he can find someone else to play. He is never alone and always playing with someone.” Anosh’s mother also agreed that he was socially involved at school and he talked a lot about his school friends. “He really likes his friends and when he sees them he gives them hugs or he says bye a couple of times before he leaves.” She believed, however, out of school, his
social interactions greatly depended on people that he interacted with and his level of comfort. “Sometimes, with some people, he is shy and sometimes with some people, he is not. He is an average kid.” Seemingly, Anosh was more social and outgoing in his school environment than his typical social environments with in his parents’ home environment.

*Children's Social Support Facilitated by Parents*

One of the main purposes of this research study was to examine the consistency of each child’s social interaction patterns across the two contexts of school and home, in an effort to measure the child’s comfort level in the school context. One of the aspects in children’s social interaction is the social support that children receive from their parents. The six mothers in this study, due to their different lifestyles and perceptions, had different approaches to support their children’s social experiences in and out of school environments.

For example, due to Laylee’s and Amir’s mothers’ busy lifestyle and work schedule, these mothers had to face additional challenges to provide more social opportunities for their children. As Amir’s mother indicated, “It is hard for me to find a friend; I know I should take them [out] more often or call my friends.” Surprisingly, Jamal’s mother’s approach for his social smoothness was “to stay away from him.” She explained, “When I am around him, he becomes shy and dependent on me. But when I am not around, he is totally a different child.” Reza’s mother, however, believed her active participation and involvement with his teacher and school made Reza to be more dependent on his mother and become less social with his peers.
Figure 2

*Children’s Patterns of Social Interaction Continuum (N = 6)*

Based on Mothers’ Perception

Low Contact | Moderate Contact | High Contact

Based on Teachers’ Perception

Low Contact | Moderate Contact | High Contact

Symbols for children:

- Laylee
- Ozra
- Anosh
- Jamal
- Amir
- Reza
Children's Interaction Opportunities Provided by Parents

As stated earlier, social contacts of Middle Eastern families like all other immigrants are highly connected to their relations with close family members, neighbors, friends, and other members of society. These six families were different in terms of having social relations and doing social activities as a whole family, and in terms of encouraging and providing social opportunities for their children. The level of family social interaction of the children participating in this study ranked from low to moderate high and vastly depended on the family lifestyle. The level of family social relations was an essential influence in children's individual out of school environment interactions. For the six children the factors that affected their family and individual social interactions were as follow:

- Moving and relocating. For instance, Amir's family did not have many social interactions due to their recent move from a large city to a small college town. Therefore, Amir's individual out of school relations were at the time of the study rather limited as well.

- Parents' work schedule. The children's social interactions greatly depended to their parents' work schedule. For instance, Laylee was not involved in many individual interactions with her peers due to her mother's business hours, (the family flower shop was operated by her mother and three employees five days-a-week about 10 to 12 hours-a-day). Consequently, it was very difficult for her mother to provide individual interaction opportunities.

- Having extended family members living nearby. From all six children, only Laylee and Ozra had close family members living nearby that allowed for day-to-day
interactions with kin. The other four children only had the opportunity to meet their extended family members who lived in other states in the summer time or during holidays. Thus, their day-to-day interactions were limited to friends and neighbors. In addition to the above factors, the six children’s individual social interactions were also affected by other social settings.

Religious setting

As mentioned before, the mosque is an important religious setting for the majority of Middle Eastern immigrants. Religious settings such as the mosque provide a whole host of social opportunities for children and their families. Like many Middle Eastern families, some of the families in this study were very involved with the mosque. For instance, Jamal regularly attended the mosque school to study Quran; therefore, he had additional opportunities to meet Middle Eastern children and had more interactions in the microsystem of his religious setting. Throughout her interview, Jamal’s mother expressed the importance of the mosque and the interactions they had with other Middle Eastern families there. She stated, “We go to the mosque on Thursdays and Fridays, then there is the mosque’s Sunday school for children to teach them Koran, Jamal has been going for two and a half years.” It is necessary to mention that due to religious beliefs, Jamal’s family’s interaction at the mosque was only with Middle Eastern females and their young male children.

Religious values, however, can be a barrier to Middle Eastern social interactions. For Amir, the parents’ strong religious beliefs restricted his social interactions. For example, celebrating birthdays is in opposition with this family’s faith, as his mother specified, “It is against my religion, we don’t go to birthdays.”
In addition to the microsystem of religious setting, the microsystem of neighborhood also had imperative influences on all children’s social development. Some of children had close neighborhood ties. For example, Reza and Anosh were ranked as moderate high contact by both mothers and teachers and these children had a strong connection with their neighborhoods, on the other hand Ozra who was ranked as low contact had no connection in any way with her neighborhood. Another example is Jamal. As reported by his mother (no response from his teacher), he was a shy child, although since he started kindergarten, his level of social interaction was increasing dramatically.

At the beginning of the school year, he started to interact with neighborhood children who were also from his school, his classroom, and many of them were from the mosque. There is a possibility that interacting with these children in the neighborhood setting was an additional factor in increasing his level of social interaction.

For Reza, his mother’s level of trust and unfamiliarity with other people formed his individual interactions and his closeness to his neighbors. Reza was very close to two next-door-neighbor brothers to the point that they became important part of each other lives. Anosh’ circumstances were completely different from other children. As emphasized before, Anosh had serious and life threatening food allergies. Therefore, it was problematic for his family to allow him to have individual interactions outside of his home environment or without his mother’s attendance. For this reason, he became very close to his neighbors. As his mother noted, “Anosh plays with our neighbors, they play outside most of the time or they come to our house.” Like Reza, Anosh’s social development was influenced by the microsystem of neighborhood and neighborhood
friendships.

*Teachers’ Involvement for Children’s Social Smoothness*

The support for children’s social development can also occur in the second most important microsystem setting, the microsystem of school. At school through interacting with their peers and teachers, children learn about self-expression, friendship, and problem solving (Berns, 2001). Therefore, teachers’ are responsible to provide many opportunities for children to interact with other peers, friends, and appropriate adults. In addition teachers are in charge of facilitating these opportunities for individual children based on an intimate understanding of their social development.

As reported by all mothers, the six teachers were very aware of the children’s patterns of social interaction and had made various attempts to smooth their social relations in classroom environment. All six teachers also were very aware of the important means of smoothing children’s social interactions and facilitating additional social opportunities for them. Furthermore, some of the teachers reported the efforts they have accomplished for children who were shy and had fewer social interactions. For example, Ozra’s teacher’s attempt to make more interaction opportunities for her was to place her with children that were more assertive. She revealed, “There had been times when I told her to go find someone, a specific person that I knew is a little bit more outgoing, then she’d get to try reach out a little more.”

According to his mother, Jamal’s teacher was very attentive to his social interactions and she tried many approaches to expand his peer relations. As his mother conveyed, “Every week she wanted him to play with a different child so he can have a big circle of friends rather than just Ali. She also made sure that children who Jamal feel
more comfortable with go to the same first grade class.”

Cultural Awareness in U.S. School Settings

Cultural awareness should be a truly collaborative effort for teachers and parents in U.S. school settings. As mentioned before, the NAEYC principles for Developmentally Appropriate Practice in early childhood programs recommends that the intention for cultural awareness should be based on encouraging, promoting, and fostering a broad understanding of race and ethnicity issues (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). One of the main purposes of this study was to have a better understanding of teachers’ attempts about cultural awareness, especially Middle Eastern culture.

In terms of children’s cultural awareness most teachers did not make many attempts. In this section, mothers’ reports of how teachers put cultural issues into the classroom (specifically Middle Eastern culture) will be reported and juxtaposed with teachers’ reports of how they carry out cultural awareness in their classroom. In some cases the mothers’ perspectives are somewhat similar to teachers’ perspective; however, there are some differences between the two points of view. In some cases, there are differing perspectives between some mothers and some teachers over what the teachers’ role ought to be in facilitating cultural awareness.

Figure 3 is constructed based on mothers’ reports of teachers’ activities in terms of cultural awareness, and teachers’ declarations about their classroom curriculum and school/district activities related to cultural awareness. Four of the mothers claimed that in terms of cultural identity, the teachers did not try to expose their children’s cultural background to the rest of the class. The teachers knew the families were from the Middle East, however, they did not make any effort to familiarize the other children and their
families with Middle East culture. As Reza’s mother indicated, “The teacher never asks any question about Iran or asks him to do something about Iran.” Reza’s mother, however, encouraged him to take small things from Iran to the class for show and tell and sharing days. As part of the observation of the families’ home, it was noticed that homes had artifacts of culture in them. Families had handmade crafts and decor from their native countries all around their homes. This suggests that these families valued their culture and traditional customs.

The Importance of Mothers’ Involvement in Children’s Classroom

A great deal of unexpected and useful information was gained throughout the mothers’ interviews. One serendipitous line of inquiry that emerged as important in pointing toward an understanding of the cultural openness of the classroom was the mothers’ involvement. The interview questions asked about mothers’ understandings of a variety of classroom activities and settings, and it became clear that many mothers could reply to these questions from the viewpoint of having been extensively involved in the classroom. On the other hand, others seemed to have little direct involvement. The six participating mothers had vastly different positions in terms of parent involvement. Four of the mothers were very involved with their children’s classroom and school activities throughout the school year. Anosh’s and Reza’s mothers were involved in assisting the teachers with reading and math assignments on a regular weekly basis, in addition to participating in classroom activities such as field trips, special occasions, and parent conferences.

The mothers who were active and involved in their children’s classrooms had more opportunities to offer and introduce their cultural values, however, there was little
evidence that mothers and teachers capitalized on these opportunities. When asked about how teachers introduced culture into the classroom, the mothers’ replies were clear that the teachers did not encourage them to share their culture. For example, Reza’s and Anosh’s mothers were weekly volunteers in their son’s classes, and they were familiar with the teachers and the children. As Anosh’s mother expressed, “She has done nothing for our New Year and I didn’t offer the teacher to go and talk about our culture or our New Year because I didn’t feel she is interested.” Reza’s mother also had the same opinion, she stated, “I remember with my daughter when she was in the kindergarten the teacher asked me to have a slideshow about Iran. I didn’t have that kind of approach from Reza’s teacher.”

In addition, some of the teachers also did not take an advantage of having immigrant parents available. For instance, as part of the field notes, an observation of Ozra’s teacher was documented when at the private school during the teacher interview. The class had an end-of-the-year potluck party followed by a field trip to the nearby park. The teacher asked some parents to volunteer to chaperone including Ozra’s parents, however, due to many volunteers, the teacher asked Ozra’s mother and father to leave after the party. As a result, Ozra decided to not participate in the field trip activity.

Mothers’ Perspectives Concerning Cultural Awareness

Since 1987, early childhood specialists have realized that the school programs, in addition to being “age appropriate” and “recognizing the children’s individual differences”, they also needed to be “culturally appropriate,” According to NAEYC, a high-quality program should encourage and promote the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of all children through appropriate curriculum materials and
activities that interpret various cultures fairly and sensitively and also should include the perspective of people with diverse cultural views (Gordon, & Browne, 2000).

This study examines whether the aspect of culturally appropriate practice has been allowed for this small sample of Middle Eastern families with young children through mothers’ and teachers’ perspectives. The six mothers’ perceptions regarding the importance of cultural awareness were similar. All the mothers agreed that early childhood years are a critical time for children to learn about other countries and cultures. They believed it is the teachers’ responsibility to educate children about other cultures and exemplify for them how to value diversity by being a reputable role model. As Anosh’s mother articulated,

I think it is better to introduce other cultures to the kids at this age. The kids are prepared to learn when they are young. Sometimes he comes and tells me his friends celebrate Hanukah or Christmas, they talk about it at school and at Christmas time. I took some presents for the teachers, this way Anosh knows I care and it is important time for his teachers.

Laylee’s mother was also not excessively satisfied about the teacher’s efforts to introduce their Iranian heritage in Laylee’s current school. When Laylee was attending her previous school, her teacher invited her mother to introduce Iranian culture. Although Laylee’s mother usually was not very involved with her school activities, she felt it is her responsibility to present the Iranian day to Laylee’s classmates. She explained,

The class would have different days; like one was Iranian day one was Chinese day. Parents would bring all of the different traditional things from their culture. She needed me to be there for the Iranian day and I tried to get her information and everything so she could introduce our culture to the other kids. I got together some pictures and things that we traditionally do and the language we speak. We told the other kids about the things we do in our culture and Laylee helped me too.
In addition to importance of cultural awareness in classrooms, Reza’s mother pointed out about the importance of cultural awareness in small societies like college towns. She argued, “in this type of society, people are mostly white middleclass Americans and it feels that people are living in a box and don’t have an open point of view about the rest of the world and the media is totally biased.” One of personal attitude and biases concerning race and culture can be the feelings of prejudice (York, 2000). Some parents solidly considered that teaching children about different cultures and heritages at young age prevents the discrimination and intolerance toward children of immigrants.

The attitudes of intolerance might occur from the other U.S. parents. Since September 11, Iraq war, and terrorist attacks many Middle Eastern families felt the pressure from the society. For instance, Anosh’s mother reasoned, “In the past two years, since the September 11 and the war, lots of stuff has been changed. The people’s behavior has been changed and we can feel that. The September 11 really affected our experiences.” Some mothers had additional worries; three of the mothers were wearing head covers due to their strong religious beliefs. For Jamal’s mother not following her religious beliefs was not an option, as she elucidated,

Yes they do treat us differently now, especially after September 11. There have been times that people are very impolite in store, but I don’t care, there is no way I pretend to some thing that I am not. I am not going to give up my dress, my cover, my religion, or my culture. I feel more comfortable in my cloths.

Reza’s mother also had similar experiences especially at her children’s school. She described, “When I go to the school, everybody is staring at me. After all these years they are still not familiar with me, they know who I am but parents stare at me the people at
Almost all mothers agreed that cultural awareness and sensitivity were omitted from the school curriculums or were limited to some countries on special occasions. As Reza’s mother cited, “There is a lack in terms of diversity and activities that goes with that. Maybe once a year they do a project about Mexico or countries that are close by and the kids get to hear about it.”

**Teachers’ Perspective Concerning Cultural Awareness**

In contrast to the mothers’ viewpoints, the teachers had different points of view when it came to being responsible for providing information about different cultures in the classrooms. One reason for this was that the teachers’ “hands were tied” to the curriculum books and they only could teach the materials that were assigned to their grade and school districts. Most of the teachers considered that introducing cultural assortment was not specifically geared towards the culture groups in their classrooms. The school districts did not base their curricula on the percentage of children who came from different cultures or ethnic backgrounds; instead they exclusively implemented state and district policies.

For example, Laylee’s teacher talked about their yearly core curriculum and how they followed the district assignments, “We are changing are curriculum. Our key country was supposed to be Mexico. Every year there is a different culture that we take a look at.” Eventually, the teacher remembered that due to time limitations her class did not have a chance to study Mexico after all, she explained, “This is my third year in 1st grade and we haven’t done Mexico because we didn’t have time. We haven’t done it but that’s what we intend to do next year.” However, she reported that their school had an extensive
project about West Africa and that the whole school was able to participate in this assignment,

We just got through a cultural presentation on West Africa. The school chooses different cultures every year. The kids sampled some of their foods that came from there. Then there was a presentation and a slide show and we had West African music. We had a family come and they played the drums and showed the kids how they made them. For culture things, that’s one huge way that the schools in this school district had. It is an intense look at a different culture as a school providing hands-on activities.

Like Reza’s mother, Anosh’s teacher also talked about studying particular cultures or countries around special occasions such as studying Native Americans close to Thanksgiving holidays. She stated, “One time I had a grandmother who was Native American and we were talking about the Native Americans around Thanksgiving time, she volunteered and wore a costume and talked about their culture.” Moreover, Anosh’s teacher also referred to her experience from her previous years that the school district allocated the study of China. She confirmed,

One time the school district decided a country to each grade level and kindergarten was assigned China. We studied China every year around Chinese New Year and that gave us the opportunity to talk about that people have different costumes, they have different language, and they write letters differently than we do.

Seemingly, Laylee’s and Anosh’s schools that were part of a same school district in a central city suburb had same cultural activities assigned to their school, regardless of the percentage of children enrolled from that particular country or culture.

Early childhood professionals have agreed that an appropriate practice should consider the social and cultural context in which children live by ensuring that children’s learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for all children and their families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Some teachers, however, believed they were not
responsible for including children's cultural background in their curricula. One teacher even went farther and claimed that it is parents' responsibility to ask teachers if they may volunteer and to introduce their culture. Ozra's teacher argued that, "If the parents volunteer and they want to do it and ask me I will give them the opportunity. I did that for someone from England because the mom came and asks me to do it." Later, she added "if children want, I go to their parents and ask them what things are different. Some years I do that, although, I haven't done that this year." Some teachers appear to believe parents (and children) are responsible for advocating for their cultural values.

Five out of six mothers reported that their child's teachers did not make any attempts to introduce and familiarize children with Middle Eastern culture (See Figure 3). Jamal's mother, however, had a different experience with his teacher and her attempts for cultural awareness. Jamal's teacher was not part of this research study. Therefore, the teacher's efforts for cultural awareness are only based on mother's interview. In accordance with Jamal's mother responses, his teacher had many assignments about different countries. As stated by his mother, there were six children from six different countries in Jamal's classroom and the teacher did many activities related to those six countries. For instance, once she asked the parents to make a food dish and share it with the class, or they had a show and tell activity that children were asked to bring something made of fabric or any item from their home country. The mother remembered, "Jamal took one of my dresses, my cover, and different foods [snacks]." Jamal's mother was one of the three mothers mentioned earlier who were more religious and wore traditional Muslim clothing.

NAEYC principles and ecological perspective describe school and parent
collaboration as key to child’s success. The parents’ dissatisfaction does point out that collaboration between parents and school has not been achieved and the best interests of the child are not being addressed.

*Teachers’ Activities related to Cultural Diversity*

As shown in Figure 3, there are dissimilarities between mothers’ and teachers’ perceptions concerning cultural awareness. For instance, Amir’s and Laylee’s mothers believed the teachers did not have any interest in including their cultural values. However, both teachers reported that they had many activities and they invited all parents as well as Middle Eastern parents to share their cultural. As Amir’s teacher claimed,

I have a two-month period we talk about cultures and foods and different traditions. I send out a letter and ask if they are willing to share traditions and foods. I don’t always get a good response. So I have to pull everything together and just depend on volunteers.

In addition, Amir’s teacher also reported that she personally tries to find traditional clothing from different countries for her classroom. Although she has students from Middle Eastern countries, it was observed that she does not have any traditional garments from the Middle Eastern countries. The teacher expressed,

I try to have books from different countries. My son is in the navy and whenever he visits new countries, which have mostly been the Asian countries, he sends little outfits for the children so that I could put those in my Home living area. I had a lady who was going back to Nigeria and she brought back clothing. So I have some things scattered around the room but I don’t have a lot of the Middle Eastern [materials].

Laylee’s teacher described her approach:

For all of them the awareness that the world is a big place and that we are surrounded with this entire rich heritage and everybody has some wonderful things to bring to the table. We talk about the world as one big place not as specific as Middle Eastern, Asian, White or black. It not something we get into about the differences, we are always more about how we are alike. It is all about getting along and being respectful
towards each other.

Anosh’s teacher reported that as part of their umbrella curriculum the school had an activity called International Fair. The school notified families to prepare food and asked the international children to share something with the rest of the school like "how they came to America." She explained,

One year our school did something that was like a paper doll shape and all the children got to take one home and dress it the way their descendants would have been dressed. They had held hands and we staple them all around the school and the children talked about them. The families were very supportive of the activity and helped their children going through it.

The five teachers that participated in this research study, however, strongly believed that at young age of five and six children are not biased and having a dark hair, dark eyes, or race do not isolate Middle Eastern children, however, they were agreed that later on when the children get older the separation and discrimination often happens because of children’s different culture. As Reza’s teacher described,

Kids at this age are expecting of each other less and this is just the way it is. If there are problems with children being isolated because of their culture or race, it often happens later. I don’t know why, but it seems this stuff sets in later and more garbage comes up in higher grades. The reason I don’t see it here because I teach kindergarten
Figure 3

*Teachers’ Attempts to Introduce Diversity Continuum (N = 6)*

*Based on Mothers’ Perception*

![Bar chart showing teachers' attempts to introduce diversity based on mothers' perception.](image)

*Based On Teachers’ Perception*

![Bar chart showing teachers' attempts to introduce diversity based on teachers' perception.](image)

**Symbols for the teachers:**

- Laylee’s Teacher
- Ozra’s Teacher
- Anosh’s Teacher
- Jamal’s Teacher
- Amir’s Teacher
- Reza’s Teacher
Mothers Perception's Concerning Children's Cultural Conflict

One of the challenges that children of immigrants might experience is cultural conflict and choosing between their parents' culture and U.S. culture (Garcia, 2001; McCarthy, 1998). Some children of immigrants are not certain about their inheritance and are confused about their mixed culture. For example, Reza did not have a clear image about being an Iranian child, as his mother explained, "Recently, he asks me questions like am I more American or Iranian? And I am not sure why. I tell him that you are both, your parents are Iranians but you have born here and that's the only reason you are American." For some mothers, it was essential that their children knew who they are and where they came from. These mothers were concerned that their children may possibly consider themselves different than other children due to their diverse heritage. As Laylee's mother emphasized,

I just talk to her and let her know that her background is something else. She is not necessarily a foreign student, who she is not, because she was born here, but the only thing is she has a different background from the other kids in her school. That's okay and she can do whatever the other kids do. She is here to enjoy it and this is her country too.

In addition, these mothers believed it was the teachers and school administrators' responsibilities to build the necessarily collaboration between Middle Eastern parents and the microsystem of school. They also assumed, in a long term, this strong relationship between parents and school would have numerous positive influences on their children. These children will grow up to be adults with more confidence and better social skills, and are able to use their proficiency to help other people.

From five teachers who were interviewed, Anosh's teacher was interested in other teacher' approaches about cultural awareness. After the interview was over, she asked the
investigator what she as a Middle Eastern preschool teacher offers in terms of supporting the cultural diversity in her classroom, how the investigator involves parents in introducing their cultures, and as a Middle Eastern mother what the investigator expects from teachers.

Summary

Ecological perspective model was employed to explore and understand the various influences on the child’s socialization and interaction in the U.S. school settings. Of the six mothers represented in this study, almost all had the same perspective about the U.S. school settings. All the mothers recognized that the teachers were very familiar with their children and they greatly were knowledgeable about and sensitive to their social interactions. Teachers were also found to be vastly aware of children’s level of social interactions and their circle of friends. Throughout the interviews, the teachers described their efforts that they had made to enhance each child’s social interactions. It appeared that all teachers provided age appropriate and individual differences appropriate experiences for children.

When it came to diversity and cultural awareness, however, the majority of the mothers believed that teachers did not make efforts to include their cultural values in the curricula. In addition, the teachers identified barriers to their ability to provide more classroom education on cultures. Some of the teachers even admitted that their knowledge about the Middle Eastern culture was limited, and that they were not certain what steps they should take to increase their competence about cultural diversity and Middle Eastern culture in particular. In spite of this uncertainty that they did not seem to make use of the parents to increase the classroom awareness of Middle Eastern culture.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the past decades there have been extensive changes in the United States population. Every year, millions of immigrants enter the U.S. borders and a significant percentage of these immigrants are from Middle Eastern countries. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to have a better understanding of Middle Eastern families and children’s experiences in U.S. school settings. This study focused on the six Middle Eastern mothers’ perspectives concerning their children’s social interactions and the level of teachers’ awareness about their heritage and cultural values. The desire for studying the Middle Eastern children was initiated by an enthusiasm about the social wellbeing of this population.

Examining the six Middle Eastern mothers’ perceptions toward U.S. school settings was presented within ecological model. The ecological perspective recognizes the child as the center of the model. This model claims that the personal characteristics of child can be critical to positive or negative outcomes of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The microsystem settings of family and school have the most direct effect on the daily lives of five to seven year old Middle Eastern children living in the United States, along with the reflection of interactions (mesosystem) between the two microsystems (Barns, 2001).

The six children who participated in this study had different patterns of social interactions. Some children were introverted, some were extremely social, and some were average with moderate patterns of interactions. Therefore, these children had different levels of social with peers’ contacts in and out of school environments. They had their own circle of friends that included their family members, peers, neighbors, and children
from the mosque. The level of family interactions was depended to the family lifestyle, availability of parents, and their attempt to socialize with other Middle Eastern and U.S. families. The families' levels of interrelations shaped the children's social interactions. Regardless of being shy or outgoing, these children established friendships with their peers, neighbors, and other children in their own comfort zone. While children's shyness or outgoing nature seemed to be the prime factor in understanding their friendships and social interactions at school, parents' and teachers' efforts to provide additional opportunities and strengthening the previous relations were imperative aspects as well.

As mentioned before, the teachers of the six children were very experienced and had been working in the field of early childhood education for many years. These teachers certainly fulfilled the first two NAEYC Developmental Appropriate Practice standards: employing age and individually appropriate learning strategies. The teachers treated each child as an individual by knowing every child's strengths, interests, and needs. Some of these teachers went further and made efforts to guide children's social development by providing more interaction opportunities for them.

The majority of mothers stated that in terms of facilitating children's social development in Western culture and U.S. society the teachers and schools were adequate. Most of the mothers, however, believed that when it came to being culturally appropriate, the curriculum and attention to the parents' involvement fell short. In one example, the teacher did not take the parents' time and efforts into consideration. All teachers did involve and engaged parents in meaningful participation, however, some mothers felt a bi-directional flow that recognizes their unique skills and experiences in terms of cultural awareness was not fully addressed by the teachers. The majority of the mothers reported
that they were accessible and involved throughout the school year. As the mothers were explaining about their observations of the children's teachers in the classrooms, some teachers were unsuccessful to take advantage of the cultural resources that could be provided by these parents. Even for those mothers who were easily available and willing to participate, teachers did not utilize them as resources and did not ask them to introduce cultural diversity into their classrooms.

On the other hand, majority of teachers reported that they were sensitive to cultural awareness and they did attempt many activities based on cultural diversity, assigned by school districts and individually. Some teachers also stated that they did send notes and asked for parents' participations and did not get any responses from the immigrant parents.

This research study has discovered a vital perception about parents and teachers approach in terms of cultural awareness. The subject matter that can be revealed in this area is that parents believed teachers should come to them and ask for their help with the cultural contribution to the classroom, and teachers considered that parents should come forward and offer their assistance in the cultural arena. Teachers felt parents should offer and parents felt teachers should ask. The NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines also talks about the parents as the child's first teachers and their responsibilities to build a strong collaboration with their children's teachers and school. Theses themes suggest that parents as well have responsibilities and are accountable for assisting teachers for providing culturally appropriate experiences for all children.

The data in this research study suggest that there is a need for stronger parent-teacher collaboration for Middle Eastern children. Based on ecological perspective
model, the more positive relations between family and school (mesosystem), the more support will be provided for children. In addition, the more efforts immigrant parents and teachers put into home and school partnerships, the richer experiences the children of immigrant families can obtain, and fewer opportunities will be omitted for them.

Furthermore, the data also provides a solid foundation about the lack of current state of cultural appropriateness in the schools and districts. The guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood developments suggest that it would be beneficial to children if school districts address appropriate cultural diversity by providing workshops and training sessions that instruct suitable methods for supporting diverse children and their families. These workshops need to include simple, basic, and easy to process information about children of different culture and factors that influencing their lives, beliefs, and ethnic values.

Limitations

Sample

For this qualitative study and population, purposive sampling was employed. Berg (2001) suggested this category of sampling is successful when researchers can employ their special knowledge and expertise about their selected subjects. Therefore, this sampling allowed the investigator to use her experiences and perceptions as a Middle Eastern mother about this group of Middle Eastern mothers who are representing this population. In addition, Berg (2001) argued that this purposive sampling ensures that certain types of individuals and certain characteristics are included in the study. The mothers were well-educated and recruited from a small college town and a central city suburban in northwest Oregon. These families were not new arrivals and living in U.S.
with a range from eight to 17 years. Their children were U.S.-born and attended private and public schools.

One of the limitations was the size of the sample. This sample totaled six mothers and their children. Due to the population of the Middle Eastern Families in Oregon and to possible suspicions of Middle Eastern families to research and unfamiliar researchers, only six families were selected. In order to provide a basis, the investigator intended to control the different countries’ cultures that the parents came from. In addition, from six teachers of the Middle Eastern children only five teachers agreed to participate. Although the sample was small, it supported the exploratory examination of the Middle Eastern mothers’ perceptions about the U.S. school settings and their view about the children’s level of social interactions, in addition to understanding of the children’s personality and temperament and teachers’ level of efforts for cultural awareness.

Discussion and Implication

Creating a Multicultural Experience in U.S. Schools

One of the barriers in providing culturally appropriated curriculum is that people like teachers, principals, or school administrators who may not represent the cultural diversity of the student population are creating the curriculum. Creating a truly multicultural curriculum means interrupting or questioning the familiar ways for children and developing a program that reflects ethnic diversity (Gordon & Browne, 2000). The curriculum topics need to expand and elaborate the concepts of diversity, fit logically into children’s experiences, and include the perspective of culturally diverse people (Brekamp, 2000).

One useful avenue toward constructing and implementing culturally appropriate
program is to involve immigrant parents. Culturally diverse parents and their children can be part of the teaching process; by doing so, the children would feel more secure and their immigrant parents would also feel more confident and welcomed. Being from a different culture and most likely being familiar with another language allows the children of immigrants to contribute aspects to the cultural atmosphere of the classroom. Furthermore, all children and their parents could learn to respect differences and be more compassionate to others, regardless of their nationality and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is vital to include the immigrant parents and their children in teaching curricula.

Immigrant parents can be involved in the area of literacy development. Immigrant parents can support children’s learning processes through literacy activities and development of fundamental language skills and to help children become proficient in English; therefore, they can achieve higher levels of competence. Parents can provide books, posters, pictures, arts and crafts, and hand-on-activities in their native language to increase cultural awareness. In lower grades, teachers can invite immigrant parents to present their cultures by providing simple materials such as pictures, posters, hand made crafts, storybooks, and traditional customs. Parents can participate at sharing time and play their native music or tell their traditional folk stories, or bring their favorite recipe and have a cooking activity with all children. At higher grade levels, teachers can involve parents by presenting their country’s geography, history, policies, politics, and religions.

Furthermore, school administrators and principals can plan for enhanced multicultural events and fairs in ways that address the particular population of children and families in their school. The school district administrators can utilize empirical
research studies to design plans for international nights and fairs that are more effective by involving all immigrant parents not only families who are from more familiar countries and cultures. By including all immigrant parents in international nights and fairs, parents could share their cultural values with other parents, teachers, and children. Therefore, by transferring cultural and linguistic identity, children learn about their cultural and ethnic inheritance. In addition, parents are able to receive support from other parents, teachers, and staff, so that they feel like they are part of a supportive community and they can support their children's developmental outcomes.

**Potential for Future Research and Education**

This study focused only on six mothers' perceptions, however, these perceptions suggest the need for more in-depth study about school presentation of multicultural education. Through this research, six mothers discussed their true feelings about the U.S. school settings, their viewpoint about the importance of Middle Eastern cultural perception, and the limited teaching about the Middle East in their children's classrooms and schools. Despite the limitation of the small sample of six mothers and five teachers, this study represented the voice of these Middle Eastern mothers who believed their children's teachers are not doing enough in terms of cultural awareness and the school districts are not providing appropriate umbrella curricula that suits all children; especially children of immigrants. There is a possibility that immigrants from other areas of the world might have similar perspectives regarding U.S. early childhood schools in terms of cultural awareness. Obviously, there is more work needs to be done to develop appropriate multicultural programs and curricula for children.
**Suggestions for Culturally Appropriate Programming:**

The field of early childhood education promotes developmentally appropriate practices, which means the knowledge about each child's individual personality and characteristics, learning style, and experiences; along with child's social and cultural context (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Acknowledging each child's culture and family background leads to a multicultural education. Multicultural education is about day to day classroom practices; therefore, the teachers should incorporate diversity into all interactions of their classrooms. This multicultural education, however, should not be limited to the classrooms. It must be included in schools and district activities as well. The multicultural practice in early childhood education is a vast field of study. Schools have a long way to go to be truly developmentally appropriate in terms of addressing cultural diversity. These suggestions are a beginning and a step toward infusing diversity.

**Extension Programs:**

There are many extension programs that could be serviceable for all families and immigrant families as well. In this chapter, several programs and activities that extend the family's cultural experiences into the classroom for the benefit of all families and children in the school community are proposed. These programs are designed to support all families through providing family education, community education, and advocacy. In addition, they could assist immigrant families and their children to (a) maximize their comfort as a foreign family, (b) to increase their knowledge of American culture, and (c) to introduce their native culture to other families. In this fashion, parents receive support from other immigrant parents, teachers, and the community.

These programs need to be year round programs and take place on a regular basis.
and timelines, which could be monthly or quarterly. Teachers are responsible to organize and provide activities. Therefore, they need to meet regularly to discuss the plans, brainstorm new ideas, to review curriculums and lesson plans, and schedule the time and location of the activities. Teachers could spend some time during the classroom period to prepare the activities with the whole class, regardless of children’s participation in extension programs. All families need to be recruited through parents’ letters, school message boards, school announcements, and attachments to children’s monthly folders, this way all parents can have the necessarily information. Parents need to be strongly encouraged to participate with their whole family, specifically if the extended family members like grandparents or other relatives are living with the family or close by.

There are many ways to operate such programs. For example, each teacher and their classroom could be responsible for one activity. These activities could include operating booths, music activities, games, and cooking and baking. The band and music teacher could prepare the upper grade children for playing international music and lower grade classes could cooperate to make decorations during art periods; in this way, teachers could create positive competitions between children within same classroom or same grade. Children could also operate booths such as, reading books and stories in their native language with their parents. Thus, children could work on language curriculum and lesson plans provided by teachers.

The next vital step could be involving immigrant parents in these programs. Parents could be volunteers and send the newsletters, handouts, and information to all parents and guardians. Parents could be invited to the classrooms to organize the activities; they could gather materials and information for children’s projects, help
children through steps of the projects, and finally help them to setup the activities.
Parents could also operate and supervise booths, such as a name writing booth that will teach children and adults to write their names in different languages. Furthermore, parents could tell stories, sing native songs, or teach native dance wearing their native customs and cultural clothing. Parents could also introduce their native country’s New Year (Chinese New Year, Iranian New Year, Ead, Ramadan, Día de Todos Santos, and etc.), special religious and traditional holidays. Moreover, parents could prepare and provide native foods, beverages, and desserts as part of their involvement in activity booths.

These ideas are simple and doable; they are inexpensive and do not require extensive budgets. School districts and teachers can adopt these ideas and formatted to their school’s level of diversity. Seemingly, there are two alternatives for school administrators with children of immigrants, one overlooking the fact that these children have different family backgrounds and cultural values, second educating and familiarizing teachers, parents, and all children with these differences. Teachers are very willing to positively effect changes in children’s social lives, however, they are not properly trained to provide culturally appropriate programming for the children of immigrants.

As mentioned before, teachers and parents need to work together for the benefit of home and school collaborations for children of immigrants. Therefore, there should be more training for teachers about ways to engage parents to address cultural needs of the classroom. School leaders should encourage teachers to involve immigrant parents in their day to day classroom practices by setting up healthy competitions, granting awards,
Applying a true multicultural practice in early childhood schools requires that the school administrators provide multiple workshops and trainings throughout the school year to update and educate teachers about different cultures and diversity. There should be also more discussions and evaluations in district and state programs to build relevance in the exploration of cultural in the curriculum. In addition, the education programs that are in charge of student-teacher training need to put cultural awareness in their consideration and include appropriate courses in their teacher preparation.

This chapter has outlined some key elements that could be in place to facilitate collaboration between parents and teachers to foster cultural awareness in the classrooms. Such efforts will support true cultural awareness in U.S. early childhood settings and benefit all young children and their families.
REFERENCES


Research and policy on U.S. immigrant (pp. 3-46). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate.


Web Sites:


APPENDICES
Sure, here is the text of the cover letter as requested:

**Appendix A1**

**OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY**
**Human Development and Family Studies**

**MOTHERS' COVER LETTER**

**Date 2/5/04**

**Dear Mothers:**

I am a graduate student in the field of Human Development and Family Studies. I am interested in Middle Eastern parents' perceptions and their experiences in U.S. public school settings. In addition, I would like to know more about cultural and linguistic issues that Middle Eastern children might face when they enter a new school environment.

As a Human Development and Family Studies graduate student, I am looking for mothers who are interested in being interviewed. The interview will last approximately one hour. Your interview, together with others, will be combined for interpretation, and the results will be used for my Masters thesis. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions.

The answers you provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Special precautions have been established to protect the confidentiality of your responses. The transcript of your interview will not contain your real name; rather, it will be identified by a pseudonym (made-up name), or number. Audiotapes will be destroyed after transcriptions are completed. **Your name will never be used in any publication or report of this study.**

If you choose to participate, you may benefit from the knowledge you are helping other mothers and families to learn more about Middle Eastern parents' perceptions and their experiences in U.S. public school settings. Your participation is extremely valued.

If you have any questions about the interview, please contact me at (541) 737-8287 or (541) 737-1099, or by e-mail at badiées@onid.orst.edu. If I am not available when you call, please leave a message and I will call you back as soon as possible. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Thank you for your help. I appreciate your cooperation.

Sincerely

Shahrnaz Badiee
Appendix A2

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
Human Development and Family Studies

TEACHERS' COVER LETTER

Date 2/5/04

Dear Teachers:

I am a graduate student in the field of Human Development and Family Studies. I am interested in Middle Eastern parents' perceptions and their experiences in U.S. public school settings. In addition, I would like to know more about cultural and linguistic issues that Middle Eastern children might face when they enter a new school environment.

As a Human Development and Family Studies graduate student, I am looking for teachers who are interested in being interviewed. The interview will last approximately half-hours. Your interview, together with others, will be combined for interpretation, and the results will be used for my Masters thesis. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions.

The answers you provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Special precautions have been established to protect the confidentiality of your responses. The transcript of your interview will not contain your real name; rather, it will be identified by a pseudonym (made-up name), or number. Audiotapes will be destroyed after transcriptions are completed. Your name will never be used in any publication or report of this study.

If you choose to participate, you may benefit from the knowledge you are helping other teachers and families to learn more about Middle Eastern parents' perceptions and their experiences in U.S. public school settings. Your participation is extremely valued.

If you have any questions about the interview, please contact me at (541) 737-8287 or (541) 737-1099, or by e-mail at badiees@onid.orst.edu. If I am not available when you call, please leave a message and I will call you back as soon as possible. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Thank you for your help. I appreciate your cooperation.

Sincerely

Shahrnaz Badiee
Appendix B1

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
Human Development and Family Studies

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT: MOTHERS

Project Title: An Evaluation of Middle Eastern Families: Middle Eastern Mothers’ Perspectives of U.S. Early Childhood Schools

Principal Investigators: Kate MacTavish and Shahrnaz Badiee, Human Development and Families Studies

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to evaluate the Middle Eastern parents’ perceptions and their experiences in American school settings. It is essential to understand how young children adjust in early elementary settings, when their parents are from a Middle Eastern country, and their cultural experiences are different from American culture. The knowledge gained from this study will increase understanding of Middle Eastern parents’ thoughts, feeling, and attitudes toward their children; in addition to children’s learning process and experiences in American school settings. Furthermore, this study can accumulate valuable information for assisting families from other countries, and provide useful information for teachers working with Middle Eastern children. The intended use for this research is for master’s thesis.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. This process is called “informed consent”. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

I am inviting you to participate in this research study because you are from a Middle Eastern country with a child aged five to seven years old.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will take approximately one to one and half-hours to complete the personal interview. The time will be used to engage in an open-ended interview and answering the interview questions regarding your thought and feeling about American school settings. The interview will be tape-recorded. In addition, you will be requested to fill the circle of friends’ form for your child’s school peers.
The following procedures are involved in this study. To participate, you must be a mother of a five to seven year old child. You must also be from one of the Middle Eastern countries. After determining eligibility, you may or may not be asked to participate in this study. You must understand that a requirement of your participation is to engage in an audiotaped interview.

The mothers of six Middle Eastern children age five to seven years old will be interviewed once. The interviews will be administrated in families’ homes or any public place of your choice.

**RISKS**

The possible risks associated with participating in this research project are minimal. It is possible the questions will raise some difficult thoughts and feelings for some families; in addition, some families may feel uncomfortable sharing private information. Families who want to talk about their experiences will volunteer, thus minimizing the risk of becoming upset. In addition, phone numbers of the Benton County Mental Health Center and the Oregon State University counseling and psychological Services will be available.

**BENEFITS**

The potential personal benefit that may occur as a result of your participation in this study is that you can take pride in being a part of an important study that examines the Middle Eastern parents’ perceptions and their experiences in American school settings. The researchers anticipate that society may benefit from this study by your contribution to an evaluation of these perceptions and experiences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. Consent forms will not be kept with the interview scripts. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified. The transcript of your interview will not contain your real name; rather, it will be identified by a pseudonym (made-up name), or number.

**AUDIO RECORDING**

By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been told that audio recordings will be generated during the course of this study. The recordings are being made for the purpose of analyzing the interview questions. The participant will be identified on the recordings by pseudonym on the recording and the principal investigator
will be the only one with access to the recordings. The recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet. I will be the only one who will transcribe the recordings, and as soon as my class project is graded the recordings will be destroyed.

_________________________ Participant’s initials

COMPENSATION

As a thank you gift, you will receive a book depending upon on the age of your child.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. You are free to not answer a particular question if you do not feel comfortable. You may withdraw from participation at any time. The data collected from you prior to withdrawal it will be not included in the results.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact the Principal Investigator: Kate MacTavish, PhD. @ 737-9130, or send e-mail to kate.mactavish@oregonstate.edu or Student Researcher: Shahrnaz Badiee @ 737-8287 or 737-1099, or send e-mail to badiees@onid.orst.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu or by mail at 312 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed): ________________________________

_________________________ (Signature of Participant) __________ (Date)

POTENTIAL FOR FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

- There is a chance you may be contacted in the future to participate in an additional study related to this project. If you would prefer not to be contacted,
please let the researchers know at any time.

**RESEARCHER STATEMENT**

I have discussed the above points with the participant or, where appropriate, with the participant’s legally authorized representative, using a translator when necessary. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

(Signature of Researcher)  
(Date)
Appendix B2

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
Human Development and Family Studies

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT: TEACHERS

Project Title: An Evaluation of Middle Eastern Families: Middle Eastern Mothers’ Perspectives of U.S. Early Childhood Schools

Principal Investigators: Kate MacTavish and Shahrnaz Badiee, Human Development and Families Studies

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to evaluate the Middle Eastern parents’ perceptions and their experiences in U.S. school settings. It is essential to understand how young children adjust in early elementary settings, when their parents are from a Middle Eastern country, and their cultural experiences are different from U.S. culture. The knowledge gained from this study will increase understanding of Middle Eastern parents’ thoughts, feeling, and attitudes toward their children; in addition to children’s learning process and experiences in U.S. school settings. Furthermore, this study can accumulate valuable information for assisting families from other countries, and provide useful information for teachers working with Middle Eastern children. The intended use for this research is for master’s thesis.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. This process is called “informed consent”. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

I am inviting you to participate in this research study because you are a teacher that Middle Eastern children, aged five to seven years old participate in your classroom.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will take approximately thirty minutes to complete the personal interview. The time will be used to engage in an open-ended interview and answering the interview questions about the Middle Eastern children’s social interaction and peer relation in U.S. school settings. The interview will be tape-recorded. In addition, you will be requested to fill the circle of friends’ form for the
child’s school peers.

The following procedures are involved in this study. To participate, you must be a teacher of a five to seven year old Middle Eastern child. You must understand that a requirement of your participation is to engage in an audiotaped interview.

The teachers of the six Middle Eastern children age five to seven years old will be interviewed once. The interviews will be administrated in a private room of the public schools that the six children are attending.

**RISKS**

The possible risks associated with participating in this research project are minimal. Teachers who want to talk about their experiences will volunteer, thus minimizing the risks. In addition, phone numbers of the Benton County Mental Health Center and the Oregon State University counseling and psychological Services will be available.

**BENEFITS**

The potential personal benefit that may occur as a result of your participation in this study is that you can take pride in being a part of an important study that examines the Middle Eastern parents' perceptions and their experiences in U.S. school settings. The researchers anticipate that society may benefit from this study by your contribution to an evaluation of these perceptions and experiences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. Consent forms will not be kept with the interview scripts. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified. The transcript of your interview will not contain your real name; rather, it will be identified by a pseudonym (made-up name), or number.

**AUDIO RECORDING**

By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been told that audio recordings will be generated during the course of this study. The recordings are being made for the purpose of analyzing the interview questions. The participant will be identified on the recordings by pseudonym on the recording and the principal investigator will be the only one with access to the recordings. The recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet. I will be the only one who will transcribe the recordings, and as soon
as my class project is graded the recordings will be destroyed.

_____________ Participant's initials

COMPENSATION

As a thank you gift, you will receive a children's book.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. You are free to not answer a particular question if you do not feel comfortable. You may withdraw from participation at any time. The data collected from you prior to withdrawal will be not included in the results.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact the Principal Investigator: Kate MacTavish, PhD. @ 737-9130, or send e-mail to kate.mactavish@oregonstate.edu or Student Researcher: Shahrnaz Badiee @ 737-8287 or 737-1099, or send e-mail to badiees@onid.orst.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu or by mail at 312 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

POTENTIAL FOR FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

• There is a chance you may be contacted in the future to participate in an additional study related to this project. If you would prefer not to be contacted, please let the researchers know at any time.
RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant or, where appropriate, with the participant's legally authorized representative, using a translator when necessary. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

(Signature of Researcher)  (Date)
### Appendix C

**Mothers’ Background Information Sheet**

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<tr>
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<td>7. Years of Experience</td>
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<td>Sunni</td>
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<thead>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
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<td>2. Place of Birth</td>
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<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Grade</td>
<td>______</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. How long you have been living in the U.S.? ______
2. How long you have been living in this town? ______
3. Are you planning to stay in the U. S.?_______
4. What was the main reason for your family coming to the United States? Please describe.
5. What language do you speak and what language your children prefer to speak at home?
6. Did your child have any previous experiences in other school settings, such as childcare, preschool, or kindergarten? Please describe.
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: MOTHERS

1. Please describe your child’s social experience with peers, (1) in school environment, (2) out of school environment, and (3) Middle Eastern community. Probe: After school activities, sport activities, birthday parties, social gathering, and sleepovers.

2. Who are your child’s close friends, (1) in school, (2) out of school? Do you know their parents? If yes, please describe your relationship with their parents?

3. Please describe your relationships with other parents in school setting. Probe: How important it is for you and your family to have relationship with other parents?

4. Please tell me about how you relate to your child’s teacher.

5. As a Middle Eastern immigrant, how satisfied are you with your child’s social experiences in the school setting?

6. Tell me something that the teacher has done to smooth your child’s social experiences. Probe: What do you think school/teachers could do to smooth your child’s experiences?

7. Tell me something that you have done to support your child’s social experiences in school. Probe: What do you think you, as a parent could do to smooth your child’s experiences?

8. Has there been a time when your family values, cultural practices, or religion made your child’s social experiences difficult, (1) at school, (2) with U.S. families, and (3) with U.S. culture? Probe: Food, alcohol, TV, clothes. Please explain.

9. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share with me that we have not discussed during the course of this conversation? Thank you.
Apprendix D2

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
Human Development and Family Studies

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: TEACHERS

1. How many years of experiences you have as a teacher? How many years of experiences, if any with Middle Eastern children?

2. Please describe (child's name) as a student in your classroom. How does he/she socially function? Probe: How social (child's name) is. What type of behavior you have observed to come to this opinion.

3. Please describe (child's name) social interaction with his/her peers at classroom/school. Probe: Do you consider (child's name) as a low contact or high contact child.

4. Please describe your relationship/interaction with (child's name) parents. Do you consider them as engaged and involved parents?

5. Do you know any peer group that the child is involved with? Probe: Why do you think this child has social interaction with this peer group? Have you noticed any distance between (child's name) and other U.S. children due to his/her nationality?

6. What do you think you as a schoolteacher can offer/have offered to (child's name) and other children of Middle Eastern immigrants in term of social and emotional development? Please give some examples.
Appendix E1

MOTHERS' CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Child
Appendix E2

TEACHERS' CIRCLE OF FRIENDS
Appendix F

Laylee

She was a seven-year-old first grader born to Iranian parents. She was the oldest child in her family, with one three-and-a-half years old brother. Due to the fact that her family moved to a different residence in the same town, she had to change schools after winter holidays. Both the mother and the teacher believed the moving and changing schools affected her social interactions at the beginning, however, after couple of months she adjusted to her new environment. Laylee had to face some challenges as a “new kid in the class.” As reported by her teacher, “These were questions that I didn’t see as unusual for someone coming in [late] but sometimes a lot of the kids don’t say anything but she was very up-front about it, is like I am having problems can you help me?” Laylee’s mother also mentioned that changing her school in the middle of the year caused her some difficulties; however, she managed to carry on and made new friends.

Laylee’s teacher described her as a very friendly, outgoing, and helpful child who loved to do little tasks. Laylee’s mother also agreed that she was vastly social and made friends easily. “I know Laylee and wherever she goes, she makes friend. She has more friends than I do. I am sure she has no problem with that at school.” Laylee’s mother stated that she did not know many of Laylee’s friends due to changing school and not being too involved in her class.

Anosh

He was a six-year-old kindergartner who was living with his Iranian parents and his 21-year-old brother whom was attending a college in the same central city suburb. He was born with severe and life-threatening food allergies. Later, I will explain how his
food allergies affected his social interactions in and out of school. As reported by his
teacher, in addition to the fact of being “a typical kindergarten boy, [who] mostly played
with other boys and had lots of boy friends in the class,” he was very popular among his
classmates and “lots of kids loved to play with him.” During the interview, his teacher
constantly talked about him being friendly, outgoing, and very social.

It appeared that Anosh’s teacher viewed him as a very social and high contact
child, she mentioned, “If one friend is busy doing something, he can find someone else to
play. He is never alone and always playing with someone.” Anosh’s mother also agreed
that he was socially involved at school and he talked a lot about his school friends. “He
really likes his friends and when he sees them he gives them hugs or he says bye couple
of times before he leaves.” She believed, however, out of school, his social interactions
greatly depended on people that he interacted with and his level of comfort, “sometimes,
with some people, he is shy and sometimes with some people, he is not. He is an average
kid.” Seemingly, Anosh was more social and outgoing in his school environment than his
home environment.

Reza

He was a five-year-old kindergartner born to Iranian parents. He was the younger
child in his family, with a nine-year-old sister. His mother and his teacher described him
as a very social, extremely outgoing, and very loving child who loved attention from
other children and adults. His teacher believed because of his personality and not being
shy at all, he socially functioned very well. At the time of interview, his teacher talked
about his high social skills, she commented, “He is very socially involved. He is tending
to be, and he had a need to for being interacted with other kids and me, he wants to be
social, and he loves attention, if it’s from me or other children.”

As Reza’s teacher and mother noted, he was “in the younger side” due to his birthday being close to the state deadline. It seemed his age and his high social interactions with other children sometimes distracted him in the classroom and were barriers to his work habits. His teacher claimed, “If he sits on a table where anybody would talk to him, he will be chit chatting. I had to work on that to get him to focus and not talking too much, because he is such a little friendly fellow.” Reza’s mother highlighted that the positive outcome of his high social interactions was caring for children who “talk a little bit funny, and have bad teeth.” He shared with his mother that some children made fun of a classmate and he was so proud that he was not like them. He shared with his mother, “today I played with a kid that nobody usually plays with him, I play with him and I am nice to him.” Based on Reza’s mother and teacher he was a high contact child at school and home environments.

Ozra

She was a seven-year-old first grader. Ozra’s mother was born in Palestine and was raised in Qatar and her father was from Syria. She was the youngest child in her family, with one 19-year-old brother and one 10-year-old sister. Although her parents were Moslems, she was attending a private Catholic School in a central city suburb. According to Ozra’s mother and teacher, she was an excellent student but very quiet. Her teacher, however, believed “sometimes she can be real quiet where she just sits and does nothing and just watches everyone, other time she gets up and participates.”

The mother’s perception of her school social interactions was same as the teacher. Ozra’s mother believed due to her shyness, “it takes her a long time to be social with her
friends." Ozra’s teacher and mother both were agreed that she was a very quiet girl who only felt comfortable interacting with people she knew and she became very shy around people that she did not know. In addition, Ozra’s mother clarified that they had many family members such as aunts and cousins who lived nearby that she hardly socialized with other children. When it came to her comfort zone, the teacher also agreed that she felt more contented around her cousin who attended the same school.

Amir

He was a five-year-old kindergartner born to Jordanian parents. He was the oldest child with a four-and-a-half years old sister. Due to Amir’s mother acceptance to a Ph.D. program, about a year ago, his family moved from a central city suburb to a small college town. Kindergarten was Amir’s first early childhood experience; therefore, he had some language barriers at the beginning of the school year. His teacher believed that difficulties in understanding the English language somehow affected him socially.

His mother also alleged that at the beginning of the school year he was shy and less social with his classmates due to not having any previous early childhood experiences. In addition, Amir was not interested in “group play” and much rather to play with one or two classmates. His teacher indicated, “He enjoys playing with the other children. Often, he would maybe focus on playing with one other child that would vary from time to time.” According to Amir’s mother, he was leaning toward older children for social companions. His mother pointed out that “he plays with people that are older than him. He doesn’t usually play with kids his age.”

Jamal

He was a five-year-old kindergartner born to Pakistani parents. He was the
younger child with one twelve-and-a-half years old sister. At the time of the interview, his older sister and father were not living with him. It necessity to indicate that as a result of Jamal’s teacher’s disagreement for participating in this research study, only the mother’s interview responses, the mother’s circle of friend’s form, and field notes were employed to describe his social interactions.

At the beginning of the school year, Jamal was associating only with one child. Ali was Jamal’s close friend; they attended a same preschool class for two years and they were also neighbors. Ali had some common characteristics as Jamal, he also was a shy boy from Middle East, his family was very active at mosque, and like Jamal he was participating in many religious gatherings with his mother. Hence, for Jamal, being extremely close to Ali was predictable.

Additionally, Jamal’s mother shared that because “he was only playing with Ali, the teacher called me and asked, ‘is there any religious problems that he only wants to talk to Ali?’ I said, because we are neighbors and he is kind of shy with the new boys.” Eventually, he was improved owing to his teacher’s hard work. As Jamal’s mother expressed, “he improved a lot. He is doing well in kindergarten. His teacher worked very hard makes him socialize.”