Contextualizing Experiences of Parent Engagement: Iraqi Refugee Mothers’ Perceptions of Their Role in Their Child’s Education in the United States

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CONTEXTUALIZING EXPERIENCES OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT:
IRAQI REFUGEE MOTHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN THEIR CHILD’S EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Heather Nicole Kholif

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Education
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

May 2018
This Dissertation by: Heather Nicole Kholif

Entitled: *Contextualizing experiences of parent engagement: Iraqi refugee mothers’ perceptions of their role in their child’s education in the United States*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Education, Program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

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Linda Vogel, Ph.D., Co-Research Advisor

________________________________________________________________
Randy Larkins, Ph.D., Committee Member

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Maria Lahman, Ph.D., Faculty Representative

________________________________________________________________
Date of Dissertation Defense

Accepted by the Graduate School

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Linda L. Black, Ed.D.
Dean of the Graduate School and International Admission
ABSTRACT


To meaningfully capture the experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers in the United States, this study embraced qualitative tradition and employed narrative case study methodology to explore the primary research question: How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their children's education in the United States? Through a critical race feminist theoretical lens, this study offers an examination of intersectionality and the way race, gender, and culture shaped Iraqi refugee mother’s experiences of parent engagement in the U.S.

The participants within this study included five Iraqi refugee mothers, two who were living in the Western U.S. and three who were living in the Eastern U.S. Data were collected over four months and included 10 individual interviews, one focus group interview, 97 hours of observations, and artifact collection. Thematic and structural narrative analysis revealed three interconnected themes: Identity, Efficacy, and Advocacy.

The findings were presented through individual and collective narratives within three scenes that were connected to each primary theme. Identity was explored at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, education, and religion. Efficacy was looked at through
the lenses of self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Advocacy was presented from the vantage points of Iraqi refugee mothers as advocates and of educators as advocates.

The discussion connected the research findings surrounding the perspectives of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers to the need for a widespread educational emphasis on culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. Furthermore, organizational and leadership implications were shared that implored policy makers and educational leaders to shift the conversations about student achievement and family culpability towards issues of social responsibility, justice, and equity.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, identity, intersectionality, Iraqi mother, Iraqi refugee, narrative case study, parent engagement, parent involvement, qualitative inquiry.
DEDICATION

“Understanding diversity includes knowing how diminished we all are when voices go unheard.”
(Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 11)

This dissertation is dedicated to Iraqi refugee mothers and their families. May your voices be heard and your dreams for the future realized.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I will be forever humbled by voices of the courageous women who entrusted me with their stories of loss and redemption, fear and courage, challenge and resiliency. Your stories have forever changed the way I view the world, and I hope that your words within the pages of this dissertation speak to the hearts of educators across the country, inspiring solidarity and a greater understanding of the experiences Iraqi refugee families face in their journey to rebuild their lives within the United States.

To my beautiful family, I will never forget the immense sacrifices you made to support me through this journey. To my husband Mahmoud, your endless support and encouragement is what got me through each day. You inspired me, supported me, and believed in me every step of the way. And to my wonderful children, you were truly my inspiration to begin this journey in the first place. Malik, your sweet songs; Nyerra, your beautiful laugh; Kasen, your gentle reassuring smiles; Eliana, your exuberant hugs; Josiah, your boundless jokes – all of this was for you my children. This is proof that no matter where you start in the race of life, you can accomplish anything you set your mind to and are willing to work for. The journeys we take in life may not always be easy, but they will always be worth it!

To my mother, I will forever be grateful for your boundless love and support through this process. To my grandmother, I am eternally thankful for your encouragement and endless faith. To both of you, thank you for being my sounding
boards and confidants. You are both an inspiration to me and I could not have
accomplished all that I have without your sacrifice, dedication, patience, and love.

I am also deeply grateful to my colleagues and friends, of which there are too
many to name. You have each inspired me and given me the courage to reach for the
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that can be found in one voice and giving me the confidence to pursue this important
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and giving me the tools I needed to embark on this journey. I was honored to be your
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Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Mary Ellen Good whose research with
migrant families encouraged and inspired my work with refugee families. Your selfless
dedication to not only students and families in our community but to issues of educational
equity and social justice are truly inspiring.
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CHAPTER I
FRAMING THE INQUIRY

Education has long been considered a fundamental human right and is an important ingredient in fostering a greater understanding among people across the world, alleviating poverty, and minimizing social inequities (Inter-American Democratic Charter Article 16, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Schlechty, 2009). While the inherent right to education is rarely a debate within contemporary U.S. culture, the approach taken to educate youth and engage parents in an increasingly pluralistic society is continually evolving (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2009). Equity in education is a driving force in guaranteeing a quality education for all students regardless of their circumstance (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2005; Sahlberg, 2010). In pursuit of excellence in education, educational leaders are charged with the responsibility of navigating the continually moving boundaries surrounding multicultural education in public schools to ensure equity is guaranteed for all students.

At the heart of educational reform lies the achievement gap which is the disparity between white and minority student achievement and is an unremitting challenge within the educational system in the United States (Carpenter II, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rothstein, 2004; Williams, 2011). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 required achievement scores to be
disaggregated by race which revealed troubling disparities between white students and students of color. There are persistent gaps between minority and non-minority students, as well as between socioeconomic (SES) polarities, the poor and the privileged (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2010; Santana, Rothstein, & Bain, 2016). Wagner et al. (2006) contended that the failure of education reform efforts to close the persistent gaps in achievement is primarily the result of a “misunderstanding of the true nature of the education problem we face,” stressing that the problem is “less about a rising tide of mediocrity than about a tidal wave of profound and rapid economic and social changes” which they believe are not well understood by educators, parents, and the community (p. 25).

In combating the achievement gap, there has been significant research attempting to isolate factors that are responsible for the continued disparity in student achievement outcomes. Some variables identified as contributors to a widening achievement gap include home-based factors such as socioeconomic status and parent involvement (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2010; Williams, 2011). School-based variables connected to the achievement gap include teacher quality, classroom instructional strategies, and tracking (Williams, 2011). Psychological constructs such as the effect of racial stereotypes and perceived discrimination are factors additionally linked to a decrease in student achievement (Williams, 2011). Despite which lens the achievement gap is viewed through, closing the gap and reducing the racial disparities present in educational attainment is a critical imperative for all educators (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2005; Rothstein, 2004).
Issues of educational equity permeate nearly all facets of education, but one critical area of increasing importance that will support leaders’ pursuit to close the gap lies within the arena of parent engagement (Schlechty, 2009). As an essential ingredient to student success and achievement, parent engagement is considered a vital factor related to positive educational outcomes and benefits all students, especially minority, immigrant, migrant, and refugee populations (Auerbach, 2012; Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Epstein, 1995; Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali, 2014; Good, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Mapp, 2003; Sy, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009). As Nieto and Bode (2012) discussed, schools are a part of the community which means “they reflect the stratification and social inequities of the larger society” and only through multicultural education in a sociopolitical context and by “addressing inequities in the larger society can we hope to solve these problems” of underachievement (p. 41). The sociopolitical context, or the laws, regulations, policies, practices, traditions, and ideologies of schooling, cannot be understood within a vacuum and must be explored through the experiences and context of the children and adults who inhabit schools (Nieto & Bode, 2012). According to Nieto and Bode (2012), when families become involved in their child(ren)’s education, there is greater potential for the school to gain an understanding of the values, lifestyles, and realities of those in their communities. Additionally, when parents are involved, “their language and culture and the expectations they have for their children can become part of the dialogue, and through dialogue, true change can begin” (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 139).
While there is a significant amount of research showing the positive impact of authentic parent engagement practices (Carreon et al., 2005; Epstein, 1995; Georgis et al., 2014; Good, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Mapp, 2003; Sy, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009) and research about other diverse groups of refugees, there is a dearth of research specifically focusing on the experiences of parent engagement through the lens of Iraqi refugees. Furthermore, the unique perspectives of parent engagement and voice of Iraqi refugee mothers is missing within the literature surrounding parent involvement in education. To ensure that more students are likely to succeed (Hollins, 1996) and to build productive boundaries and bridges (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) between schools and Iraqi refugee families, research surrounding the experiences of engagement of Iraqi mothers is imperative.

To bring greater voice to the Iraqi refugee families within U.S. public schools and to help build a bridge of understanding between educators and marginalized refugee parents, this study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of parent engagement through the lens of Iraqi refugee mothers in the U.S. To frame this research inquiry, I open this chapter by making a case for parent engagement as a predictor of academic success. The focus then moves to reveal some of the barriers of authentic parent engagement with marginalized populations. The shifting demographics within the United States are presented and then I highlight the large populations of Iraqi refugee families that have come to live in the Western and Eastern regions of the United States. The context surrounding immigration and refugee resettlement is explored and then the spotlight moves back to outline the importance of viewing parent engagement through the
lens of Iraqi refugee mothers. The statement of purpose and research questions are then shared along with a disclosure of my stance as the researcher. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief overview of the chapter and the terms used throughout this study are defined.

**The Case for Parent Engagement**

Central to all discussions surrounding student achievement are parents, who want nothing more than the realization of all the hopes and dreams they have for their child (Good, 2010; Good, 2015; Schlechty, 2009). In playing a significant role in closing the educational gaps between children of different socioeconomic backgrounds and racial groups, evidence suggests that parent engagement needs to be at the forefront of conversations in education (Belway, Durán, & Spielberg, 2011; Jeynes, 2005; Miretzky, 2004). No other stakeholder has such an invested interest in positive outcomes for a student, so naturally, educators should strive to leverage education’s greatest resource – parents (Good, 2015; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Families play a critical role in their child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009). With over forty years of evidence, research reveals that family involvement is one of the greatest predictors of student academic success and thought by some educators to be the primary vehicle by which student achievement can be elevated (Hara & Burke, 1998; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Jeynes, 2005; Weiss et al., 2009). Historically, parent involvement has been mandated at both the state and federal levels starting with Title 1 of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965, through the *NCLB*
legislation in 2001, the reauthorization of ESEA in 2010, and again in December 2015 when the ESEA was renamed *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2017c; Grant & Ray, 2013; United States Department of Education, 2010).

Title 1, Part A, section 1118 of the ESEA Federal policy broke down the specific requirements for local educational agency (LEA) implementation of parental involvement policies requiring each LEA, including local school districts, to address the following action steps within a written parental involvement policy including how the LEA will: involve parents in the joint development a policy, provide coordination and assistance for planning and implementing effective parent involvement activities, coordinate and integrate strategies within early childhood programs, conduct annual evaluations of the content and effectiveness of the policy, and identify and address barriers to participation by parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background (United States Department of Education, 2016). According to Title 1, Part A in the ESEA, a local educational agency may only receive funding under this section if the LEA “implements programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents in programs” that are consistent with the requirements of section 1118 and are “planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children” (United States Department of Education, 2016).

A school’s individual responsibility was more explicitly defined in section 1118 (a)(e) of Title 1, Part A which required that each school and LEA must build capacity for involvement by: (1) providing assistance to parents of children served by the school in
understanding academic standards, academic assessments, and how to monitor a child’s progress; (2) providing materials and training to help parents work with their children to improve their children’s achievement; (3) educating educators about the value of parent involvement and how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners; (4) integrating parent involvement programs into early childhood programs and parent resource centers; (5) ensuring that information relating to school and parent programs, meetings, or other activities is provided to parents in a format and language the parents can understand; (6) involving parents in the development of training for educators; (7) providing necessary literacy training from funds received under this part if LEA has exhausted all other sources of funding; (8) paying reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and childcare costs, to enable parent participation in school-related meetings; (9) training parents to enhance the involvement of other parents; (10) arranging school meetings at a variety of times, or conducting in-home conferences, in order to maximize parental involvement and participation; (11) adopting and implementing model approaches to improving parental involvement; (12) establishing a districtwide parent advisory council to provide advice on all matters related to parental involvement; (13) developing appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities; and (14) providing such other reasonable support for involvement activities under this section that parents may request (United States Department of Education, 2016).
The most recent reauthorization of ESEA with President Obama’s *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was signed into law December of 2015 and required states to develop an ESSA state plan to address standards, assessment, and school and district accountability (CDE, 2017a; CDE, 2017c; Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI], 2016). In May of 2017, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) submitted Colorado’s state plan to the U.S. Department of Education and included a section on family, school, and community partnerships which was created in partnership with the State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education (SACPIE), and endorsed a list of promising partnership practices that schools have used across the state that fell under the following six standards: (1) creating a welcoming climate; (2) communicating effectively; (3) supporting student success; (4) speaking up for every child; (5) sharing power; and (6) collaborating with the community (CDE, 2017b). Districts and schools all across the state provided ideas for meeting these standards that could be utilized by other LEAs.

All of the mentioned federal and state mandates have provided a blueprint for reform aimed at raising expectations for students, fostering innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and promoting partnerships between schools and the families they serve (National Education Association [NEA], 2008; United States Department of Education, 2010). While legislation including parent involvement has attempted to promote partnerships between educators and parents, the mandates are limited in their ability to provide educators with the tools and understanding they need to authentically partner with parents, specifically those coming from diverse families.
In pursuit of authentic parent engagement practices, educational practitioners and leaders must successfully navigate cultural borders to build relationships with highly diverse families (Good, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Effective family engagement is a shared responsibility and co-constructed between educators and parents (Grant & Ray, 2013). Within an increasingly diverse educational environment, effective communication between parents and educators may be strained as the differences in culture and language create barriers (Good, 2010). While successful parental involvement requires families, schools, and communities to all take an active role in supporting students through building mutually respectful relationships and partnerships (Epstein, 1995; Miretzky, 2004; Weiss et al., 2009), researchers have found that when teachers reach out to families, the families are more likely to be actively involved in their children’s education in some capacity (Grant & Ray, 2013). Educators thus have a responsibility to pursue positive and authentic relationships with families, especially those families who may face greater barriers to school involvement than others (Turney & Kao, 2009).

**Shifting Demographics**

To authentically engage the diverse families within our schools, Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, and Ali (2014) and Weiss et al. (2009) determined that educators need to understand the unique historical circumstances that surround many of the children within our classrooms, especially refugee children. Immigrants, which include refugees, are the fastest growing population in the U.S. (Tienda & Haskins, 2011), and the academic success of immigrant children is paramount in the pursuit of closing the achievement gap.
According to Turney and Kao (2009), the United States attracts more immigrants than any nation in the world. Among these documented immigrants to the United States, approximately 50,000 to 100,000 annually are refugees (Birman, 2005). The United States operates the world’s largest formal refugee resettlement program in the world, having granted asylum status to 25,199 people and having resettled 69,933 refugees in the year 2015 alone (Zong & Batalova, 2015). The U.S. resettles the largest number of refugees of any country in the world (Marks, 2014).

**History, Policy, and Controversy of Refugee Resettlement in the United States**

In order to recognize the unique circumstances surrounding refugee families in the U.S., it is important to understand the historical context surrounding refugee resettlement. The United States has long been a country of refuge for those who are fleeing persecution (Zong & Batalova, 2015). After World War II, more than 250,000 displaced Europeans entered the United States prompting the U.S. Congress to enact the first legislation surrounding refugees in 1948 (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration [BPRM], 2015). This legislation in 1948 inspired the United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which recognized the “right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries” and the United Nations Convention High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951 was established to fulfill this declaration and international commitment to protect refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2010, p. 5). In Article I of the *Convention Relating to the Status of*
Refugees, the UNHCR adopted the following legal definition of the term refugee: “A refugee is a person who is unwilling or unable to return to his or her country of origin because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political opinion” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2010, p. 3). This creation of a common definition further helped streamline international policies surrounding refugees (Marks, 2014).

In 1980, under the Reagan administration, the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement passed the Refugee Act (1980) which serves as the foundation of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program and provides a “systematic procedure for the U.S. government to admit and effectively resettle refugees” (Marks, 2014, p. 1). As a requirement of resettlement within the United States, the majority of refugees must first be identified as being in need of international protection through resettlement (Marks, 2014). This often requires that refugees have already fled their home country after which they are referred by the UNHCR to countries accepting refugees (Marks). Resettlement is a multi-step process and obtaining a referral to the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is the first step a refugee must take to initiate consideration of resettlement (United States Refugee Admissions Program, 2016). While refugee resettlement is a complicated process, the international response is necessary for supporting the vulnerable populations displaced by war and other tragedies.

Migration Policy Institute researchers Zong and Batalova (2015) explained that by the end of the year 2014 the number of people having been displaced and seeking refugee
status was at the highest level ever recorded in history. By the end of the year 2014, there were 59.5 million forcibly displaced people as a result of ongoing wars, conflict, and persecution (Esthimer, 2014; Zong & Batalova, 2015). A record number of displaced individuals and refugees have emerged from continued conflict and instability in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Central America (Hooper, Zong, Capps, & Fix, 2016). In 1993, there was an influx of refugees to the US in response to the Balkan wars, however, after that there was a decline in US annual refugee admission until the year 2008 when there was a significant increase in the number of refugees from Iraq, Iran, and Bhutan (Zong, & Batalova, 2015). In 2015, the top three countries of origin for refugees were Burma (also known as Myanmar), Iraq, and Somalia (Zong & Batalova, 2015). To accommodate the increasing number of refugees emerging from the international humanitarian crisis, the Obama Administration proposed to increase the number of refugees the US accepts each year from 70,000 in 2015, to 85,000 in 2016, and 110,000 in 2017 (Capps & Fix, 2015; Zong & Batalova, 2015). Within the first two months after the change of presidential leadership in 2017, President Trump significantly lowered the refugee admission ceiling from 110,000 to 50,000 (Martin, 2017).

Although the United States plays a historical role in supporting refugees, the political conversations in the U.S. have increased in “anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and outright racist rhetoric and proposals – much of which has been fueled by rising Islamophobia” (Dakwar, 2016, p. 51). Due to increasing fear surrounding terror attacks around the world, controversies have arisen specifically around refugee resettlement from Arab countries (Hooper et al., 2016). Dakwar (2016) noted a historical trend of fear and
hostility directed towards refugees during times of “economic hardship, political turmoil, or war” (p. 50). He discussed the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1882 designed to keep out people of Chinese origin and the 1920s Red Scare where “thousands of foreign-born people suspected of political radicalism were arrested and brutalized” or deported without a hearing (p. 50). In 1942, during the wake of World War II, Japanese American citizens had their homes and property confiscated and were put into internment camps until the end of the war (Dakwar, 2016). A U.S. government program that enforced deportation emerged in the 1950s targeting Mexicans, and most recently, following the terror attack of 9/11 Dakwar (2016) suggested that the U.S. government “has used immigration enforcement as a justification to target members of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities for investigation, interrogation, and sometimes deportation” (p. 50).

With the continued tension worldwide and increased fear following terror attacks around the world, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the *American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act* (SAFE Act) in November 2015. Passed by the House of Representatives only two days after it was introduced, the SAFE Act mandated intensified background investigations for all refugees from Iraq or Syria which would have made resettlement for refugees from these countries increasingly difficult. The added security screenings would have taken months, if not years, to operationalize, further stifling resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in the United States (Capps & Fix, 2015; Dakwar, 2016). While the original House vote to pass this bill succeeded 289 to 137, the Senate voted down the bill in a cloture vote, meaning this bill never turned into law (Civic Impulse, 2017). Two years later, under the new U.S. Presidential
administration, Donald Trump signed an executive order attempting to ban immigration of refugees coming from seven countries including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia. Despite the federal judiciary’s block of the executive order, the U.S. is facing intensified confusion and tension with an executive order that is argued to be targeting Muslims (Diamond & Almasy, 2016; Martin, 2017). These actions taken by the President and congress indicate tumult within the political climate in the U.S., further exacerbating the challenges faced by those who are already persecuted in other countries.

**Iraqi Refugees in Colorado**

The Bureau of Populations, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM) Summary of Refugee Admissions (2016) showed that there were a significant number of Iraqi refugees that have been resettled in the United States between 2012 to 2016. Table 1 shows that years 2013 and 2014 had the highest total number of Iraqi refugees admitted to the U.S. with 19,488 and 19,769 refugees admitted respectively (BPRM, 2016). The numbers of Iraqi refugees being admitted to the U.S. are significant, and their successful integration into American society is essential.
Table 1

*Numbers of Iraqi Refugees Admitted to the U.S. and Colorado*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Total Admitted to U.S.</th>
<th>Total Admitted to Colorado</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>9,880</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>12,676</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>19,769</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>19,488</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>12,163</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>73,976</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,387</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References: (BPRM, 2016; Office of Refugee Resettlement [ORR], 2016a; ORR, 2016b; ORR, 2016c; ORR, 2016d; Refugee Processing Center [RPC], 2016)

In addition to recognizing the national trends of Iraqi refugee relocation, educators need to reflect upon the local impact of Iraqi refugees. As Table 1 illustrates, the number of Iraqi refugees in Colorado has increased by 1,387 just five years. Grant and Ray (2013) discussed how education truly provides the foundation for a new life in the United States for immigrant and refugee families and affirmed the importance of working closely with the families, attesting that an educator’s investment today will have a lasting positive impact on those families as well as the community in the future. Thus, as the number of Iraqi refugee families in Colorado increases, supporting the needs of these parents and students is crucial.
**Immigrants versus Refugees**

Within a focus on the refugee populations present within our schools, it is important to remember that immigrant experiences are not synonymous with refugee experiences. The term “immigrant” is used to describe a foreign national who enters the country for the purpose of permanent resettlement (Birman, 2005). A refugee is markedly different from a traditional immigrant as refugees did not leave their homes voluntarily and have often come from countries with natural disasters or in extreme conflict where they were forced from their homes into a refugee camp or relocation center before getting the opportunity to enter another country like the United States for refuge (Alexander, 2015; Zong & Batalova, 2015). Birman (2005) added that refugees differ from immigrants in the fact that immigrants have chosen to come to the United States and “are seen as continuing to receive the protection of their government” when they return home, whereas refugees have fled their homes due to threats of persecution and cannot return home (p. 157). While some immigrant and refugee experiences may overlap, refugee experiences are not consistently the same as those of immigrants.

**Parent Engagement of Iraqi Refugees**

Iraqi refugee families within the United States have typically come as political refugees and are what researchers describe as “marginalized” based upon their race, class, immigrant status, and language proficiency (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) point out that, while refugee parents have a marginalized status, this does not mean that they do not care about their children’s education. On the contrary, the researchers stated that “research has confirmed that linguistically and culturally
diverse groups share a deep concern about the education of their children” (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 7). While they have a deep concern for their child(ren)’s education, culturally diverse parents often perceive their role in their child(ren)’s education very differently from the way that educators and mainstream communities view their relationship with schools (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Educators will more effectively meet the needs of Iraqi refugee students if they understand parents’ perceived roles within the child’s education and come to see parents as partners in the process of schooling.

**Iraqi Families**

The family is the foundation of Arab society, and there is great value placed upon a strong family unit (Nydell, 2012). The role each member of the family plays is essential and, within Arab tradition, strong families create strong communities (Nydell, 2012). Nydell (2012) explained that family loyalty and obligation are strong and the reputation of any member of a family group reflects on all of the other members of the family. The emphasis on family honor is what drives much of the socially accepted behaviors and responsibilities within the family unit (Nydell, 2012).

Within Arab tradition, the man is recognized as the head of his immediate family and a wife’s primary sphere of influence exists within the home and out of the public eye (Nydell, 2012). Nydell (2012) stressed that, while Arab women may not be highly visible in public, they have a significant amount of power within the household. Children also have a specific role to play within the family as Nydell explained, “children are taught profound respect for adults” and typically are in close contact with older relatives which
“contributes to the passing on of social values from one generation to another” (p. 66).

Nydell further described the distinct differences in the roles of mothers and fathers and the way they relate to their children. While both parents are seen as a source of love, fathers are seen as the primary source of authority and mothers are seen as the source for emotional support (Nydell, 2012).

**Iraqi Women and Mothers**

Within an Iraqi family, a mother has the responsibility for raising her children and plays an integral role in their success. The role of an Iraqi woman within the community and family unit is vital as she is largely responsible for socializing children and transmitting religious beliefs and family and religious traditions (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003; Yacoub, 2013). Some research has shown that Arab mothers are more involved in their child(ren)’s education than their fathers which suggests that Iraqi mothers also play a significant role in their child’s education (Yacoub, 2013).

While Iraqi mothers are significantly involved with their child(ren)’s education, some Islamic countries’ cultures, including Iraq, have laws that limit active roles for women in the public sphere (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003; Nydell, 2012). These limitations on Iraqi women in their home country may impact the role they play in their children’s education in the U.S. While Iraq was one of the most progressive Arab nations in being the first to grant women the right to vote in 1948, in having 82 women serve in Parliament as of 2011, and with women thoroughly integrated into the workforce, women’s rights in Iraq were completely wiped out by the Gulf Wars (Nydell, 2012). Nydell (2012) explained that the progress towards women’s rights was reversed during
the Gulf Wars as Islamic and tribal traditions were used as political tools to consolidate power. Nydell discussed the transition from liberation to the oppression of Iraqi women:

As the economy grew worse under sanctions, women were pushed out of the labor force to ensure employment for men. All state ministries were required to enforce restrictions on women working. Freedom to travel abroad was restricted, and coeducational secondary schools were changed to single-sex only. In 2005 a new constitution was voted in, with a return to Sharia law in its most conservative interpretation. Women clearly lost ground – the constitution reinstates ancient punishments, forced marriages, and one-sided divorce. Women were discouraged from driving, and most spent their time at home, fearing attacks or kidnapping. Some receive death threats because of their sect or careers. (p. 187)

According to Nydell (2012), the wars in Iraq not only reversed the progress with women’s rights, but they also left nearly one million widows who live in severe poverty and 4.5 million orphans, constituting the greatest orphan crisis of any country in the Arab world.

Given the complex circumstances surrounding Iraqi women and their role within their family, recognizing the impact of cultural influences on parent engagement practices will be important when working towards authentic engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers in their child(ren)’s education in U.S. schools. Despite the individual hurdles each mother has faced in her journey to the U.S., Maloof and Ross-Sheriff (2003) encouraged us to look past stereotypes of submission and to not underestimate the capabilities of Muslim women. As educators, it is important to recognize the social, cultural, and religious customs that impact Iraqi refugee mothers’ successful integration into western society and, more specifically, into their children’s schools (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003).
Intersectionality of Iraqi Mothers

Hearing the voices of Iraqi refugee women requires a recognition of the ways in which each woman may perceive her experiences through intersectionality which is the intersection of race with class, gender, ability, and sexuality (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Lockhart and Mitchell (2010) explained that women have layered identities that come from their “biological inheritance, social relations, political struggles, economic status, and societal power structure” (p. 17). According to Crenshaw (1991), due to their intersectional identity as “both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (p. 1244). Crenshaw (1989) explained that looking at a woman’s experience through a single lens or issue such as race, gender, or class will only further marginalize women of color.

The experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers must be understood within the context and multidimensionality of each mother’s gendered identity, culture, race, national identity, ability level, social relationships, and political struggles. Crenshaw (1989) argued that attempts to alleviate racism, sexism, and discrimination are best handled by addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged, as others would indirectly benefit as well. “Placing those who currently are marginalized in the center is the most effective way to resist efforts to compartmentalize experiences” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167). Through an awareness of intersectionality with discussions surrounding parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers, educators may better “acknowledge and ground differences” in order to “negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1299). Using Crenshaw’s logic, the experiences of Iraqi
refugee women, in being a significantly marginalized population, should be at the center of discussions that strive to create authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee populations and seek to improve parent engagement practices in schools.

**Counterstories**

While some research about parent engagement has given voice to marginalized populations (Good, 2010), much of it has reflected traditional majoritarian stories, stories that do not explicitly acknowledge the experiences of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These majoritarian stories suggest that educational inequity stems from a cultural deficit and “pass on the belief that students of color are culturally deprived” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31). This perspective often triggers a solution of cultural assimilation, where it is argued that students of color will be more successful in school if their families assimilate into the dominant White middle-class culture (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), the cultural assimilation solution is evident in much of the rhetoric in education, evidenced through common educational terms such as *disadvantaged youth* and *at-risk*, words that very prominently perpetuate the cultural deficit perspective. To counter dominant cultural deficit perspectives, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argued that examining the experiences through counterstories, or “telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e. those on the margins of society)” is a powerful tool that can be used to expose, analyze, and challenge majoritarian stories and dominant discourse on race (p. 32). Iraqi mothers, as a marginalized population by gender, race, and religion, are often looked at through this cultural deficit lens (Parker, 2016). To help us better understand the
perspectives of Iraqi refugee families in the U.S., it is important to capture multiple voices that will help provide authentic narratives about their experiences in education.

**Significance of the Problem**

While meaningful parent engagement has been linked to positive educational outcomes for students coming from diverse populations, research has not yet prompted widespread change across the field of education (Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown II, & Bartee, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Nieto and Bode (2012) argued that, while educators may be aware of the racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity present within U.S. schools, educators’ ability to use the information in a constructive way to leverage student achievement is still very limited. Although schools cannot be expected to solve global challenges of social and economic inequity, leaders do have a moral and ethical responsibility to shift the educational focus from conversations about student and family culpability towards issues of social responsibility and equity (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Reframing understanding about effective parent engagement, specifically within vulnerable populations, would help leaders take one proactive step towards reaching this end (Coleman, 1998; Good, 2010). With the significant numbers of Iraqi refugees who have come to the U.S. and Colorado in the last five years (BPRM, 2016; ORR, 2016a; ORR, 2016b; ORR, 2016c; ORR, 2016d; RPC, 2016), educators need to respond to the needs of these families whose children are in public school classrooms. Proactively seeking ways to create authentic partnerships with refugee families and investing in their success will promote positive outcomes for not only refugee student achievement but the surrounding communities in which they live (Grant & Ray, 2013).
Purpose of the Study

To promote academic achievement for all students, educational leaders need to not only leverage multicultural pedagogical practices and resources to improve instruction but also build successful partnerships with the most influential people in a child’s life, their parents (Good, 2015; Grant & Ray, 2013). Given the vital role of the mother in an Iraqi family structure, successful partnerships with Iraqi mothers might hold the greatest potential to support Iraqi refugee students in schools (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003; Yacoub, 2013). While there was a significant amount of research surrounding parent involvement and engagement in schools and the positive effect on student achievement (Carreon et al., 2005; Epstein, 1995; Georgis et al., 2014; Good, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Mapp, 2003; Sy, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009), there was little research surrounding parental engagement specifically with Iraqi refugee mothers in public education.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) reminds us that parents are directly connected to all conversations surrounding academic achievement outcomes despite their lack of full understanding of the role they play in achieving success. This study offers a contextualized look at parent engagement from the viewpoint of the Iraqi refugee mothers themselves, giving educators an even greater understanding of how to support this population within U.S. public schools. More specifically, gaining an understanding from the perspective of the mother, this research provides significant insight into experiences of parent engagement for Iraqi families.
Research Questions

To explore the perspectives and experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers in the United States, this research dissertation is built upon the following primary research question (Q1), and to further examine and understand these experiences, the following sub-questions (Q2 & Q3) were raised:

Q1  How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their children's education in the United States?

Q2  How does culture influence Iraqi refugee mothers' experiences of parent engagement?

Q3  What is the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers?

Based upon these research questions, this research utilized a qualitative design that was structured using a narrative case study methodological approach.

Researcher Perspective and Role

In honoring reflexivity and transparency and in consideration of the vulnerability of the participant population within this study, it is important to express my stance as the researcher. My interest in working cross-culturally with diverse populations started from a young age and prompted trips to visit schools in Mexico, Thailand, and Germany. More recently, the last eight years of my life have provided me with significant opportunities to live and work within Arabic speaking communities. I have traveled to several Arabic speaking countries including Egypt, Jordan, and United Arab Emirates. I have traveled to Egypt six times, with the longest trip lasting nearly a year while I taught with my husband in a rural village in Beheira Province.
It was during my time living in Egypt that I came to fully understand the undeniable racial, economic, and social privilege I possessed as a white woman. Having a spouse who identifies as Egyptian, Arab, and Muslim awarded me an intimate view of an Arab family, religious, and cultural customs from an authentic vantage point. The times traveling abroad gave me rich experiences but also heightened my awareness of the undeniable presence of hegemony and xenophobia towards Arabic speaking populations. Upon returning to the U.S., I recognized that my perspectives of minority family engagement within my classroom had shifted, and I became very sensitive to the interactions I had with each family, much more mindful to the cultural norms that mediated our interactions.

Through experiences I have had in working with local Arabic speaking populations within my school, community, and through prior research, I have developed a positive relationship with many members of the Arab community. Through prior research, I spent a lot of time within a local mosque, and having already gained site permission from the male leaders at the masjid (Mosque) for previous research, I was considered an enculturated member within the group of women who attend the mosque. This insider status was foundational to my ability to conduct this research. The relationships I have built with Arab women outside the mosque were also incredibly important as not all Iraqi refugee women attend the masjid regularly given many of them more closely ascribe with Shi’a than Sunni traditions of Islam, the prevalent teachings at the local mosque. While I had limited experience working directly with Iraqi refugee mothers prior to engaging in this research, I had gained trust from enough women inside
the mosque and within the local Arab community that I was able to successfully identify enough participants who were willing to openly and honestly share their experiences with me in order to answer the research questions.

Assumptions

As I approached this research, it was important to reveal and acknowledge my underlying assumptions that could influence my beliefs, feelings, and interpretations throughout this study. I approached this research with the assumption that all parents have hopes and dreams for their children and have the capacity to support their child’s learning. Furthermore, I acknowledged my belief that parents and educators should be equal partners in a child’s education, and that educators bear the primary responsibility for pursuing communication, establishing relationships, and finding ways to create successful partnerships with families. Through a critical race feminist lens, I believed that by placing Iraqi refugee mothers at the center of this study, this research would challenge majoritarian stories, racial inequities, and deficit perspectives through a shift towards an asset-based perspective built upon a foundation of understanding, empathy, and respect for Iraqi refugee families. Finally, I believed that, as an educator, it was my duty to seek ways to leverage authentic partnerships with all parents and stimulate conversations around educational equity that will promote the success of every child in our nation.

Definition of Terms

The following is an alphabetic list of terms defined relative to the context of this study and intended to provide common language and understanding of the terminology used throughout this dissertation.
Acculturation

Acculturation is typically characterized as a process of an individual’s adaption within a new cultural context, including cultural and psychological changes (Berry, 2005). There are two predominant models of acculturation, unidimensional and bi-dimensional (Goforth, Oka, Leong, & Denis, 2014). Within the unidimensional model, individuals from one culture assume the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of the culture with which they come into contact (Goforth et al., 2014). The bi-dimensional model looks more closely at the degree to which a person maintains their heritage culture when participating in mainstream culture (Goforth et al., 2014). Berry (1997) defined acculturation as the process by which an individual negotiates a new culture while simultaneously negotiating whether or not to maintain the practices of his or her heritage culture. Berry (2005) asserted that the cultural and psychological changes that occur through the acculturation process involve various forms of mutual accommodations between both cultural groups and is typically a long-term process that can take years or even generations.

Arab

The term Arab is used to refer to people who originate from one of 22 different countries including: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian [AMEMSA], 2011). These countries represent a group that joined together to form the League of Arab States founded in 1945 (Watt & Cachia,
According to Watt and Cachia (2017), the term Arab is often incorrectly used with the misconception that all Arab people speak Arabic or practice Islam, however it is important to recognize that people of Arab decent are culturally, geographically, and religiously diverse.

**Counterstories**

Counter-storytelling, according to Yosso (2005), is a method of recounting the experiences and perspectives of socially and racially marginalized people. Through counterstories, narratives are intended to reveal the lived experiences of people of color in order to increase critical consciousness about racial and social injustice (Yosso, 2005). It is important to keep in mind that counterstories are not intended to simply respond to majoritarian stories but instead challenge mainstream societies’ denial of the persistence of racism through critical reflections on the histories and lived experiences of people of color (Yosso, 2005).

**Culture**

Culture is a shared social construction of norms and roles and is inclusive of material elements, customs, observable patterns of behavior, and “ideational elements: ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and ways of acquiring knowledge and passing it on” (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001, p. 1).

**Equity**

Discussions of equity in education often include the phrase *all students* as it refers to the expectation that all students should have access to an excellent education that provides solid support for student learning and is responsive to each student’s prior
knowledge, intellectual strength, and personal interest (Ovando & Combs, 2012). For educators, Gabriel (2011) defined equity as the responsibility for supporting the high-level learning of all students, with thoughtful consideration of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, sexual orientation, age, religion, ability, and gender.

**Majoritarian Storytelling**

Yosso (2005) defined majoritarian storytelling as a method of recounting the experiences and perspectives of people with racial and social privilege. Majoritarian stories typically reflect racialized omissions, distortions, and stereotypes that perpetuate myths about people of color and tend to silence or dismiss evidence that contradicts racially unbalanced portrayals (Yosso, 2005, p. 9).

**Marginalization**

The term marginalization can be defined as consigning specific groups of people to a lower or outer edge of society or to the margins of society politically, economically, culturally, or socially. Marginalization often leads to a denial of equal access and participation in decision making processes, leading to minority group subordination and dependence on the politically and economically dominant groups within mainstream culture (Sociology Guide, 2017).

**Parent Engagement**

Parent engagement has been defined throughout the literature as a collaborative relationship between the school and the people most significant in a child’s life who are responsible for the child’s education and contribute to the educational process (Hiatt-
While using terms such as parent involvement or parent engagement within the context of this study, there is an emphasis on the notion of a partnership between parents and educators, as a partnership implies an even distribution of power, giving families and educators an equal voice in constructing a meaningful relationship (Kammen et al., 2014). Thus, parent engagement in this study is defined as a partnership between families and schools and is the shared responsibility for the education of a child and is founded upon an asset-based understanding of the strengths each side of the partnership has to offer the collaborative relationship (Kammen et al., 2014; Santana et al., 2016).

**Race**

According to Yosso (2005), race is a socially constructed category that was created to differentiate groups “based primarily on skin color, phenotype, ethnicity, and culture for the purpose of showing the superiority or dominance of one group over another” (p. 5).

**Racism**

Racism is defined as the systemic oppression of people of color and ultimately privileges white people (Yosso, 2005).

**Summary**

Chapter one opened with an exploration of the achievement gap and illustrated the positive impact of parent engagement to promote greater academic success for all children. Following this was a discussion about the shifting demographics in U.S. public schools and the increasing Iraqi refugee populations present within classrooms. While
parent engagement is considered a vital factor related to student achievement outcomes, there was a gap in the literature giving voice to parents marginalized by the educational system, particularly Iraqi refugee mothers. This gap reflected the need to discuss the complexities surrounding the lives of Iraqi refugee families by bringing voice to the narratives and perspectives of Iraqi refugee mothers through counterstories. The research problem, an overview of the study, and researcher assumptions were discussed. The terms used throughout the proposal were then defined. The following chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the literature surrounding parent engagement and look at parent engagement through a traditional and non-traditional lens. Finally, it will offer a contextualized view of parent engagement through the lens of Iraqi refugee families and present literature that suggests educators would be better able to serve the needs of minority families through an asset-based approach that leverages a family’s cultural capital.
CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For several decades, educational researchers have identified the benefits of successful partnerships between families, schools, and communities as a way of increasing student achievement (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). While this research suggests that meaningful parent engagement positively impacts student achievement, successful partnerships between parents and schools are not present in every school (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). According to Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007), “the reality is that educators and parents have many beliefs, attitudes, and fears about each other that hinder their coming together to promote children’s education” (p. 27). To overcome misunderstandings that may impede successful partnerships between educators and Iraqi refugee families, this review of literature seeks to create a meaningful context in which to understand the importance of looking at parent engagement through the lens of Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences.

This review of literature begins with a look at the most prominent research surrounding parent engagement, including three important theories that have shaped contemporary views of parent and educator partnerships. The focus then shifts to examine traditional and non-traditional notions of engagement which is followed by a discussion about the cultural considerations for Iraqi refugee families in U.S. schools.
The cultural considerations discussed include a closer look at the plurality of Iraqi refugees, the historical context of Iraq, the challenges faced by Iraqi refugees, the religious implications for Iraqi refugees in the West, the religious considerations for the classroom, and the differences in communication between high-context and low-context cultures. The literature review then shifts to describe pervasive ideologies, like the deficit perspective, that perpetuate a culture gap between educators and Iraqi refugee families. The chapter concludes with a closer look at the concept of cultural capital and a discussion about the need for solidarity between educators and Iraqi refugee families.

**Parent Engagement Research**

Parent engagement is a complex concept, and while there have been numerous studies confirming that parent engagement leads to improved student achievement and providing suggestions for the best way to build partnerships, there is no common agreement on what approach should be taken to improve parent engagement practices (Kammen et al., 2014). According to Kammen et al. (2014), studies conducted between 1990 and 2010 primarily focused on the relationships between educators and parents, framing teachers and administrators as lacking in their ability to reach parents or conversely blaming minority and disadvantaged families for deficits that prevented them from effectively engaging in their child’s education. More recently, Kammen et al. (2014) concluded that there has been a shift in research over the last ten years as studies acknowledged that there are multiple factors that impact parent involvement, recognized the need for parents to take a primary role in their child’s academic achievement, and
responded to the need for an increased understanding of the shared responsibility between the community, family, and school in supporting strong academic outcomes.

While there have been numerous studies about the positive effects of parent engagement, two of the most prominent studies concluding that parent engagement leads to improved academic achievement were meta-analyses conducted by Jeynes (2005, 2007). Jeynes’ (2005) first meta-analysis included 41 studies where he consolidated different measures of parental involvement and aggregated performance scores on multiple measures to determine the effect it had on student achievement. The second meta-analysis included 52 studies and focused primarily on urban secondary students (Jeynes, 2007). Jeynes concluded that parent involvement affected student achievement by about .5 to .55 of a standard deviation, and this impact remained consistent for both white and minority students, as well as across socioeconomic statuses and gender groups.

While most research surrounding parent engagement has confirmed the positive impact on student achievement outcomes, educators and parents may hold differing interpretations of the best practices that contribute to authentic partnerships between families and schools (Epstein, 2009; Good, 2010; Santana et al., 2016).

Literature about parent engagement often uses terms such as parent involvement, parent engagement, and family involvement interchangeably and these terms are used to represent a broad range of people who might contribute in meaningful ways to a child’s education (Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Kammen et al., 2014; Santana et al., 2016). These individuals may include parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster parents, guardians, and fictive kin (friends or neighbors) (Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Santana et al.,
Family engagement or involvement is defined within this study as a collaborative relationship between the school and the people most significant in a child’s life who are responsible for the child’s education and contribute to the educational process (Hiatt-Michael, 2010).

This study, while still using terms such as parent involvement or engagement, emphasizes the term *partnership* which elevates the level of interaction from involvement or engagement to a collaborative relationship (Epstein, 2009; Santana et al., 2016). A partnership additionally implies an even distribution of power, giving families and educators an equal voice in constructing a meaningful relationship (Kammen et al., 2014). A partnership between families and schools in the context of this study is defined as the shared responsibility for the education of a child and is founded upon an asset-based understanding of the strengths each side of the partnership has to offer the collaborative relationship (Kammen et al., 2014; Santana et al., 2016).

**Perspectives on Parent Engagement**

Throughout the last thirty years, several theories have emerged that have built the foundation upon which the majority of present day research around parent engagement is grounded (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Although there have been multiple theories and frameworks developed in an attempt to understand parent engagement, three prominent theories have significantly informed research, practice, and emerging theoretical perspectives on family involvement in education: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecology of Human Development (1979), Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence (2009), and Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George’s (2004) Ecologies of Parental Engagement.
Framework. These perspectives are discussed in greater detail in this section and demonstrate an important shift in how educators understand parents’ involvement, revealing the importance of considering parent engagement from the perspective of the parents themselves.

**Ecological Systems Theory.** The Ecological Systems Theory reflects the various contexts that influence a child’s development directly and indirectly, with interconnection and reciprocal influence across all subsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hiatt-Michael,

![Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory](image)
As can be seen in figure 1, the subsystems consist of concentric circles, with the inner most circle called the *Microsystem*, which includes the interactions between the parent and child, teacher and child, and peer and child (Bronfenbrenner). The next ring in the subsystem is the *Mesosystem* or the home and school relationships. The third ring called the *Exosystem* includes the family’s occupational status. The outer most ring is called the *Macrosystem* which includes cultural norms and educational policies. Finally, everything outside of the circles is considered the *Chronosystem* or the developmental and historical shifts in practices and resources (Bronfenbrenner). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory laid the foundation for the following two major theories discussed in this section.

According to Hiatt-Michael (2010), looking intentionally at interactions occurring within the microsystem provided the foundation upon which prevailing theoretical perspectives around family engagement have emerged. Within the home setting, research has shown that parents and other primary caregivers occupy an important role in a developing child’s microsystem (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Weiss, Caspe, and Lopez (2006) conducted research that supported the notion of parenting as central to the family involvement process, “defining parenting as the attitudes, values, and practices of parents in raising children, and placing it alongside home—school relationships and responsibility for learning as a key process influencing academic and social-emotional outcomes for children” (Hiatt-Michael, 2010, p. 14). Adding to this perspective, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) contributed the perspective that parents’ decisions regarding parent engagement are shaped by their beliefs, by the invitations and
opportunities present within their child’s schooling experience, and their perceptions of available time, energy, and skills. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), parents are more likely to get involved in their child’s education when they believe their involvement is needed and will result in a positive impact on their child’s education. If a parent’s involvement is tied to their beliefs and perceptions as Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggested, educators, and in turn students, would benefit from a focused look at the perceptions and beliefs that shape partnerships between educators and Iraqi refugee families.

**Epstein’s Parental Involvement Framework.** Parent, teacher, and child relationships which exist within the microsystem and home and school interactions occurring in the mesosystem are the primary considerations within Epstein’s (2009) Parental Involvement Framework. Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence on family, school, and community on children’s learning is perhaps the most referenced in literature surrounding parental involvement. Unlike Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) framework of concentric circles, Epstein utilized a Venn diagram to illustrate the dynamic and complex relationships between three primary contexts in a student’s life, bringing together the contexts of school, home, and the community (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). According to Epstein, the overlapping spheres of influence explain the shared responsibilities of home, school, and community for a child’s learning and development, placing the child at the center of all interactions.
Figure 2 shows Epstein’s (2009) theory of overlapping spheres of influence with family, school, and community are all connected and the student is located at the center of the partnerships. Within this model, Epstein described interactions through external and internal structures. The external model recognizes that there are three primary contexts in which students learn and grow—the family, the school, and the community. The internal model represents the essential and complex interpersonal relationships and patterns of influence that occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community (Epstein, 2009).

Within these spheres of influence, Epstein (2009) has identified six types of involvement each school should prioritize: (1) parenting – giving parents the tools they need to establish a supportive home environment for students; (2) communicating –
forming authentic two-way exchanges between schools and families; (3) volunteering – effectively recruiting and organizing parent help at home, school, or other locations; (4) learning at home – providing families with relevant ideas and information that will help them support their child at home with homework or other school related material; (5) decision making – promoting opportunities for family members to serve within school committees or to help make decisions regarding the school; (6) collaborating with the community – utilizing resources and services from the community to strengthen school programing. Epstein’s framework further highlighted the notion that all aspects of parenting, including providing food, shelter, emotional support, and care, directly impact a child’s educational success. Her theory suggested that the attitudes, values, and practices of parents raising their children are key to positive academic outcomes for students (Epstein, 2009).

Epstein’s (2009) framework also highlighted the concept of connectivity between contexts surrounding a student. A key finding within Epstein’s research, which was conducted through surveys and field studies involving teachers, parents, and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, was that parent engagement is multifaceted and that meaningful dialogue between families and educators have the potential to positively impact student achievement when authentic partnerships are formed (Kammen et al., 2014). While meaningful dialogue between families and educators is essential to positive change in parent engagement practices, research suggests that dialogue must be initiated by educators (Epstein, 2009; Henderson et al., 2007; Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Santana et al., 2016). Through Epstein’s extensive research on the
importance of developing positive relationships with parents, it is evident that educators have a responsibility to begin the dialogue with parents in pursuit of greater understanding of how parents perceive their role within educational partnerships, especially with marginalized families whose voice is missing from the literature.

**Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework.** Utilizing the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) as a springboard and extending Epstein’s framework, Barton et al. (2004) developed the Ecologies of Parent Engagement (EPE) framework that demonstrated how broad ecological factors shape parent engagement, offering a new way of understanding the interconnections between “what” parents engage in and “how” they manage to do so. Within this framework, Barton et al. (2004) presented parental involvement as a dynamic and interactive process where parents draw upon a variety of experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools. In order to develop this framework, Barton et al. (2004) conducted qualitative research within high-poverty urban settings and generated thick descriptions of the focus and scope of parent and teacher interactions (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). More specifically, the researchers attempted to research parent involvement by examining how parents negotiated common understandings about beliefs and practices, as well as how they built and sustained relationships with educators, especially when practices and beliefs differed from the expectations held by both parties (Barton et al., 2004).

According to Barton et al. (2004), *space* and *capital* were essential concepts that explained how and why family members were involved in their children’s education. Space is defined as the coming together of individuals, and the roles, expectations, or
parameters set upon the participation between the individuals. Space is inclusive of the rules of interaction, as well as the location in which the interactions take place. For example, a parent-teacher conference or even a chance meeting outside of the school represents space. Barton et al. (2004) drew upon Bourdieu’s (1986) definition to explain the concept of capital, illustrating that “capital can be thought of as the human, social, and material resources one has access to and can activate for their own desired purposes” (p. 5). The following quote from Barton et al. (2004) best described this conceptualization of space and capital within the EPE framework.

Parental engagement as the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school settings means that what parents “do” in school settings (including the relationships they form, the artifacts they produce and draw upon, the expectations and roles they hold, and the divisions of labor they encounter and help to produce or reproduce) is an active manifestation of the physical and material boundaries of what it is they want to do. Parental engagement, therefore, is more than an object or an outcome. Engagement is a set of relationships and actions that cut across individuals, circumstances, and events that are produced and bounded by the context in which that engagement takes place. The basic unit of analysis for understanding parental engagement cannot be the individual actions of parents taken alone, but parents interacting with other parents, teachers, and other school-and community-based people within particular spaces. (p. 6)

The development of this framework represents a fundamental shift in how we understand parents’ involvement in their children’s education (Barton et al., 2004). It signals a shift from focusing largely on “what parents do to engage in their children’s schooling,” to also considering “how parents understand the hows and whys of their engagement, and how this engagement relates more broadly to parents’ experiences and actions inside and out of the school community” (Barton et al., 2004, p. 3). Instead of looking at what Iraqi refugee parents do to engage in their child’s education through a
traditional lens, Barton et al.’s research suggested consideration of the perceptions, motivations, and capital that drives interactions between parents and educators. Following Barton et al.’s logic within the context of this dissertation, educators will be better equipped to support the needs of Iraqi refugee students and their families if they understand how Iraqi mothers perceive their role in their child’s education and how culture may impact these experiences.

**Traditional and Non-traditional Perspectives of Engagement**

As a central factor relating to positive educational outcomes for students, parent engagement needs to be explored through a variety of lenses (Epstein, 1995). Within the literature, parent engagement is primarily reflected within traditional notions of school-based involvement, however, when looking through a lens of refugee family experiences, it is important to balance traditional and non-traditional perspectives of engagement while striving for authentic partnerships (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Auerbach, 2012; Good, 2015; Turney & Kao, 2009; Weiss et al., 2009). Perceptions of parent involvement that only reflect what happens within the walls of a school severely limit an educator's ability to see the vital role families play in their child’s academic success (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Noting the difference between traditional and non-traditional involvement perceptions will help educators recognize parent engagement as a multidimensional construct, and give greater perspective to engagement that occurs outside traditional educational settings such as classrooms and schools (Epstein, 1995; Good, 2010; Turney & Kao, 2009).
Traditional notions of parent engagement. Traditional perspectives of involvement often reflect the values of school culture and may include school-based activities such as volunteering in a classroom or for a field trip, attending parent-teacher conferences, school events, or fundraising (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Good, 2015; Turney & Kao, 2009). According to Good (2015), these traditional forms of involvement are often easier for schools to implement because they are institutionalized and have become an innate and routine part of the school culture. Rothstein (2004) argued that, while traditional forms of involvement may help a little, they cannot significantly narrow the achievement gap as varying forms of parental involvement are tied to class-based and cultural structures that are substantially more complex than surface-level assertions of effective parent engagement.

Barton et al. (2004) explained that a traditional approach to understanding parent engagement is reliant upon the deficit model and typically views parents as subjects and positions them in ways that fit the needs of the school. Some of the research surrounding traditional notions of involvement acknowledged that attending parent teacher conferences, chaperoning field trips, volunteering in the classroom, or participating in parent teacher organizations are impacted by factors such as time, energy, and the ability of a parent to get to the school (Barton et al., 2004). While trying to acknowledge barriers some families may have limiting traditional involvement, Barton et al. (2004) explained that these types of involvement simply label parents as participatory or not and are of little help in understanding the relationships and activities that make a parent “informed, competent, or involved” unless they are understood in relation to the relationships that
frame parent engagement (Barton et al., 2004). The biggest problem with a focus on traditional involvement is that it neither takes into account the “network of individuals and resources that frame participation scope, focus, and purpose, nor the unique experiences that frame the parents’ beliefs and forge parental capital” (Barton et al., 2004, p. 4). This traditional perspective thus neglects to recognize the ways in which parental engagement is a social practice established through relationships and actions as opposed to an object or outcome (Barton et al., 2004).

As the literature suggested, parent engagement is a multidimensional construct primarily conceptualized as a form of social capital, networks, and connections. Researchers have pointed out that parent involvement has been narrowly interpreted by some educators as the ways in which a parent has direct contact with their child(ren)’s school instead of within the larger context of a student’s life (Epstein, 1995; Good, 2010; Turney & Kao, 2009). In the quest for authentic parent engagement, Carreon et al. (2005) encouraged schools to “move beyond understanding discrete practices to discovering the correlation between parents’ practices in relation to the beliefs that motivate and sustain these practices, as well as the cultural capital that parents possess and activate to orchestrate them” (p. 468). This perspective fosters the notion of gaining insight surrounding parent engagement with a lens that focuses upon the motivations, values, and capital that Iraqi refugee mothers may leverage when supporting their children’s education.

**Non-traditional notions of parent engagement.** Parent engagement may be primarily reflected within traditional notions of involvement, however there are many
studies acknowledging that parent involvement at home is also crucial and important for supporting students’ academic success (Epstein, 2009; Good, 2010; Good, 2015; Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Shumow, 2010). According to Shumow (2010), educators tend to be most aware of how parents are involved at school because school-based involvement is highly visible. Shumow and Miller (2001) argued that “parents are involved at home in ways that are important to their children’s school adjustment, and parents who rarely and never come to school are often deeply involved with their children at home” (p. 62). Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2005) supported this notion when they stated that parent engagement is not merely a single event but instead a “dynamic and ever-changing practice that varies depending on the context in which it occurs, the resources parents and schools bring to their actions, and the students’ particular needs” (p. 467). These studies implied that parent engagement practices are best understood within contexts that are relevant and meaningful to the families themselves.

In non-traditional approaches, families are considered partners in a child’s education and may demonstrate support of their children through an active presence in their child’s life, a desire for a better life for their child, and use of the various forms of capital surrounding them (Barton et al., 2004). Barton et al.’s (2004) research around the ecologies of parent engagement showed that parents, specifically those coming from minority populations, engaged in their child’s education in personal spaces, supporting their child either at home or within the school by leveraging the capital they had surrounding them. Barton et al. (2004) captured the essence of non-traditional
engagement when they stated that parental engagement is “a desire, an expression, and an attempt by parents to have an impact on what actually transpires around their children in school and on the kinds of human, social, and material resources that are valued within the schools” (p. 11). Families, through these non-traditional notions of engagement at home and within personal spaces, have a profound influence on their child’s academic success (Shumow, 2010).

Georgis et al. (2014) encouraged educators to strive toward parent engagement that is reciprocal, relational, culturally and linguistically responsive, and receptive to the needs and strengths of families. To effectively engage in culturally relevant parent engagement practices, Georgis et al. communicated how important it is for educators to gain an in depth understanding of the contextualized experiences of the families they serve, particularly in communities with growing numbers of immigrant and refugee families. As Auerbach (2012) suggested, leaders need to redefine their views of parent involvement, recognize families and communities as important partners in student learning, and embrace ways in which partnerships between educators and families can be enhanced. The varying perceptions surrounding parent engagement “illustrate the importance of redefining parent engagement in relation to the social and cultural spaces in which engagement happens” (Georgis et al., 2014, p. 27). In pursuit of authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee families in U.S. public schools, this study seeks to reveal these authentic experiences of parent engagement within a context relevant to Iraqi refugee mothers.
Considerations for Working with Iraqi Refugees

As a particularly vulnerable population, refugees from Iraq have a complex background. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers, it is important to first paint a picture of the historical and cultural context surrounding their lives. While the following considerations may not apply to all Iraqi families, recognition of the historical context and the cultural, ethnic, and religious plurality of Iraqi refugees is crucial to understanding the experiences of the families that are present in U.S. public schools (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003).

This section will describe the context surrounding Iraqi refugees to provide a foundation from which the narratives of each mother will be constructed; connecting the past to her perceptions of educational partnerships today, giving educators an authentic glimpse into the reality and background of the families they serve, and hopefully the key to understanding Iraqi refugee mothers’ perceptions of parent engagement.

Diversity of Iraqi Refugees

To accurately understand the experiences of Iraqi refugees, it is necessary to build a common understanding of the geographical, cultural, and religious plurality of Iraqi refugees. As can be seen in Figure 3, Iraq is located in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula.
Ghareeb, Ranard, and Tutunji (2008) explained that Iraq includes a variety of diverse ethnic groups, languages, and religions and approximately 80% of the Iraqi population identifies as Arab, and the other 20% identify as Kurds. Another map below, as can be seen in Figure 4, shows the immense diversity of the Iraqi population and where the religious and ethnic populations are located within the country. In addition to showing the ethnic and religious diversity, this map shows the distribution of the
majority groups and where the minority populations live in relation to the majority groups.

As most Iraqis identify as Arab, it is important to delineate the difference between the term “Arab” and other tribal populations represented in Iraq. Arabs are culturally,
geographically, and religiously diverse, originating from 22 different countries: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (AMEMSA, 2011). Some literature uses the terms Arab and Middle Eastern interchangeably, but these terms are not synonymous. The term Middle East is complicated due to the fact it is not precise in identifying a geographical area and evolved within a colonial perspective and should not be used when referring to Iraqi people (AMEMSA, 2011). Iraq, while often incorrectly labeled as a Middle Eastern country, is in reality a southwest Asian country bordered by Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait (Thompson, 2003).

Whereas the majority of Iraqis identify as Arab and speak Arabic, the primary language of Iraq, the Iraqi refugee populations present within the U.S. do not reflect one homogenous group but instead are reflective of various Iraqi tribes (Malinowski, 2003). There are 22 native languages other than Arabic spoken outside of the Arab majority, and the minority Iraqi populations include Assyrians, Chaldeans, Jacobites, Yazidis, Sabeans, Kurds, and the Ma’dan (Malinowski). While Iraqi Christians are a minority, they are represented in three primary groups: the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, and the Jacobites (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Yazidis are a religious sect in Northern Iraq that integrates elements from different religions into their religious practice and primarily come from Kurdish origins, speaking the Kurdish dialect (Salih & Wilgenburg, 2014). Their religion predates both Christianity and Islam, and they are in a particularly vulnerable position presently as they are in the crossfire of violence in Iraq. (Salih & Wilgenburg). Sabeans
are another minority that are members of an ancient monotheistic religion and have roots in ancient Mesopotamia (Ghareeb et al., 2008). The Kurds reflect a larger population of Iraq and make up approximately 20% of the population (Malinowski). Kurds embrace cultures that are similar to that of their Turkish and Iranian neighbors bordering northern Iraq (Malinowski). The Ma’dan are another subgroup of Iraqi Arabs that are more commonly known as the Marsh Arabs as they primarily inhabit a marshy area near the intersection of the Tigris and Euphrates river (Ghareeb et al., 2008). This great diversity within Iraq signals the need for educators to be especially cognizant of the complex dynamics that shape the lives of Iraqi refugees, as the context of each family will differ based upon which tribe, religion, language, or tradition the student and family most closely ascribe to.

**Historical Context of Iraq**

Iraq has a long history of conquest and conflict before finally acquiring independence in 1932 after receiving full recognition as a member of the League of Nations (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Going all the way back to the Ottoman rule in 1508, Iraq encountered continual challenges, tribal uprisings, and confrontations with Persia (Ghareeb et al., 2008; Thompson, 2003). The growing interest in oil drew Western interests in the region, and after World War I ended, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled, and Britain took control over the region (Ghareeb et al., 2008). In the 1920s, the Iraqi people revolted against British rule in Iraq due to national and religious conflict (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Britain put down the rebellion but not without fueling further confrontation between the Shi’i and Sunni leaders. The British appointed primarily Sunni
leaders to the army and bureaucratic positions while granting large estates to the Shi’i to buy their loyalty (Ghareeb et al., 2008). The Shi’i leaders demanded greater representation in the government, and despite this gain in nominal independence, Iraq headed towards increased conflict in the region. As cited by Dalton (2003), Metz (1988) described the conflict that came with independence and a glimpse of the constituents that comprise modern Iraq:

“The declaration of statehood and the imposition of fixed boundaries triggered an intense competition for power in the new entity. Sunnis and Shias, cities and tribes, shaykhs and tribesmen, Assyrians and Kurds, pan-Arabists and Iraqi nationalists – all fought vigorously for places in the emerging state structure. (p. 46)”

This quote demonstrates the complexities within Iraqi culture that emerged out of centuries of unrest (Dalton, 2003). According to Dalton (2003), the turmoil in Iraq was exacerbated during World War II and the control of Iraq’s government continued to change hands until Saddam Hussein came to power.

In 1979, while Saddam Hussein appointed himself president of Iraq, Ayatollah Khomeini established the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ghareeb et al., 2008). This rise of leadership set the stage for serious conflict between the secular Arab nationalists in Baghdad and the Islamic regime of Tehran (Ghareeb et al., 2008). As a result of the tumultuous climate in Iraq before and during the Gulf War, there were devastating effects to the civilian population of the Iraq. In a survey conducted by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in 1999, findings revealed “half a million children under the age of five had died in the South since the war, due to the destruction of public health facilities and to malnutrition and shortages of medicines related to the sanctions”
(Ghareeb et al., 2008, p. 9). In an effort to support the people, U.S. Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act which provided funding for pro-democracy groups that were opposed to the Baghdad regime (Ghareeb et al.).

Despite the shift in policy toward the regime in Iraq and the U.S. Congress advocating the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the White House was not prompted into action until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Within his state of the Union address in 2002, President Bush announced his declaration of War on Terrorism and “declared Iraq to be part of an ‘axis of evil’” (Ghareeb et al., 2008, p. 9, emphasis in original). Following this, in March of 2003, the United States and Britain invaded Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom (Ball, 2014), and Baghdad fell in April of 2003, revealing no evidence that Saddam Hussein was linked to the terrorist attacks nor any weapons of mass destruction (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) took control as a transitional government after the fall of Baghdad; however, clashes began between CPA-appointed Iraqi officials and indigenous leaders. Ending an era of Sunni domination in Iraq, the Shi’i leadership along with U.S. support sought to ensure the rule of the Shi’i majority (Ghareeb et al., 2008). This move resulted in ethnic and religious tensions among many groups, as well as alienating the Sunni sect (Ball, 2014). In response to their marginalization, the Sunni formed a coalition with the other disgruntled members of the former Ba’ath regime and intelligence officers creating the “international terrorist network al-Qaeda, which did not exist in Iraq before 2003,” that sought to retaliate against the U.S. and Iraqi opponents (Ghareeb et al., 2008, p. 10). Al-Qaeda was joined
by a terrorist leader from Jordan, Abu Mas’ab al-Zarqawi, and together they engaged in attacks on innocent civilians and suicide bombings (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

Since the U.S. invasion of 2003, Iraq has been ravaged by the absence of protection, law, and order (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Despite the leaders from both Shi’i and Sunni camps expressing support of national cohesion, the sectarian killing and widespread ethnic cleansing created pockets of homogenous populations across Iraq (Ball, 2014; Ghareeb et al., 2008). As of 2008, an estimated two million Iraqis fled Iraq to take refuge in neighboring countries (Ghareeb et al., 2008). In 2014, alone there were 1.9 million newly displaced Iraqi civilians, some of which are trying to find refuge in the country’s northern Kurdish region (Esthimer, 2014). Iraq became a collection of authorities ranging from Shi’a militias to Kurds attempting to reclaim land they lost from ethnic oppression, Iraq “slid into a vicious civil war marked by populations displacements and ethnic cleansing” (Hazbun, 2015, p. 62). Recognizing the historical turmoil that has shaped modern day Iraq provides a context for educators to better understand the challenges that Iraqi refugees faced and how it may impact their experiences today within the education.

Challenges Faced by Iraqi Refugees

Given the political, religious, and historical context of their country, Iraqi political refugees face unique challenges. The majority of the 4.5 million displaced Iraqis have fled to countries in the region such as Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, and Syria; however, due to entering these neighbor countries without documentation, they are “considered illegal and therefore benefit from only limited legal protection” (Mohsen,
Despite the significant number of Iraqi refugees having fled to Turkey, Turkey only grants refugee status to people coming from European countries (Mohsen, 2016). According to Mohsen (2016), refugees who flee to Egypt may be able to enter the country but are prohibited from seeking employment and may not utilize services provided by the government. The pursuit of visas for legal entry into a neighboring country often results in Iraqi families being separated, and after the families have fled Iraq, there is little opportunity for the family to return to gather assets they may need to support themselves (Mohsen).

Mohsen (2016) discussed that these challenges significantly impact the lives of displaced Iraqi people as they are often unable to access even the most basic of human services like the registration of marriages, births, and deaths nor do they have the ability to seek the employment necessary to support themselves. Mohsen explicitly states:

Iraqis in this situation continually fear arrest, detention or deportation to Iraq. Men are usually more at risk of being arrested and therefore need to stay out of the authorities’ sight; as a consequence, women have to take the lead in accessing assistance. This increases the risk of sexual harassment and exploitation while out in the streets and at assistance centers but because of their illegal status in the country they very rarely approach police or concerned authorities if they suffer harassment. Even people who have some legal status send their children out to work instead of themselves because of fear of arrest; as a result, children are being deprived of schooling and are more likely to be victims of abuse and exploitation. (p. 1, para 5)

The challenges faced by Iraqi refugees further exacerbate their experiences and will undoubtedly impact their perspectives and interactions in their community and school (Georgis et al., 2014).
Religious Implications for Iraqi Refugees in the West

In an era of growing tension between Islam and the West (Brown & Jones, 2013), it would be remiss to exclude the religious implications for Iraqi refugee families of which the vast majority resettled in the United States are Muslim. Islam is a world religion, the second largest in the world with 1.6 billion members in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Maloof and Ross-Sheriff (2003) discussed that 15% of all refugees entering the U.S. are Muslim and that these refugees have come from 77 different countries (p. 3), Iraq being one of these. The majority of Iraqi Arabs, Kurds, and Turkoman practice Islam although they may differ in their degree of adherence to its beliefs and practices (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

While the Iraqi refugees reflect great diversity and not all may identify as Muslim, there may be shared experiences of “racial profiling, heightened scrutiny, government surveillance and other forms of oppression based on ‘guilt by association’ prior to, and heightened as the result of the events of September 11, 2001” (AMEMSA, 2011, p. 1, emphasis in original). Birman (2005) discussed that Arabs, which include Iraqi refugees, as a racial minority in the U.S. may experience challenges, discrimination, and prejudice. As educators, it is crucial to understand this significant connection between culture and religion for Muslim refugees so that there is greater understanding of the individual worldview each family has and an increase in the ability to strengthen relationships through an understanding of their perspective. Maloof and Ross-Sheriff (2003) alluded to the fact that, for many observant Muslims, Islam is more than a system of beliefs; it is an entire way of life. This way of life transcends the walls of a classroom and must not be
disregarded. Even within the majority Muslim population of Iraqi refugees, there may be significant differences within the experiences of the refugees based upon which sect of Islam they most closely ascribe to, Sunni or Shi‘i. To combat misunderstandings, it is important for educators to understand the basic tenets of Islam and be cognizant of the basics surrounding a faith which has had a long history of influencing the experiences of Iraqi refugees.

**Basic tenets of Islam.** Islam is a world religion that emerged out of the Middle East and was founded by the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet Muhammad was believed to have received divine revelations from God which were collected in a holy book called the *Qu’ran*. Muhammad’s sayings and records of personal conduct were put together into what is called the *Hadith* which “forms the basis for a code of behavior that is relatively standard across the Muslim world, despite local variations” (Ghareeb et al., 2008, p. 12). Traditional Islam considers religion and law to be inseparable (Ghareeb et al., 2008). The faith follows a lunar calendar and important Islamic holiday traditions revolve around the Islamic calendar (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

The basic tenets of Islam follow the Five Pillars of Islam. The first pillar encompasses a declaration of faith where a Muslim would say “*La Elaha Ella Allah, Mohammad Rasoul Allah*” which in English translates as “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah.” The second pillar encompasses prayer and the requirement of Muslims to pray facing Mecca five times a day (Ghareeb et al., 2008). The third pillar is the requirement of practicing Muslims to fast. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is a month of fasting from sunrise to sunset, where
Muslims are expected to refrain from drinking, eating, smoking, or partaking in any other worldly pleasures (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Ramadan is a particularly important tradition that educators need to be aware of as they work to respond to the needs of Iraqi refugee families. The fourth pillar centers around the expectation that Muslims give to charity. Finally, the fifth pillar is the call to Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca which is located in Saudi Arabia.

In adhering to the five pillars of Islam, Muslims are called to live a virtuous life filled with good deeds. Within this life, Muslims strive to overcome jihad, which translates to English as “the struggle.” Ghareeb et al. (2008) pointed out that the term jihad has been highly politicized and incorrectly used to reference “war in the name of Islam” (p. 13). Contrary to this, the true concept of jihad centers around the “struggle to do good works and avoid evil thoughts, words, and deeds and to live every day in the way that God has prescribed” (Ghareeb et al., 2008, p. 13). This misunderstanding of a simple term illustrates the importance for educators to strive towards a correct understanding of the values foundational within the Islamic faith so that vulnerable Iraqi refugees are not further marginalized by the unintended consequences of stereotypical perspectives, ignorance, and limited understandings of the principles guiding refugee families present in our classrooms.

Shahada. Islam is considered by Muslims to be one religion, and all Muslims profess the same Shahada (declaration of faith) regardless of the branch of Islam they most closely identify with, Sunni and Shi’a (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003, p. 7). While Muslims throughout the world share the same essential beliefs and values, cultural
overlays cause differences in the ways individuals and groups observe their faith. Many cultural traits of people of Middle Eastern and Asian origin are consistent with Islamic values, and it is sometimes difficult to separate cultural characteristics from religious expectations. These include self-control and restraint in emotional expression, respect for authority, distinct social roles and expectations, awareness of social standing, communal responsibility, high regard for the elderly, and the centrality of family relationship and responsibility (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003, p. 7-8). These values have a prominent role in the way Iraqi refugee families may approach interactions and relationships with educators, thus making it crucial for educators to pursue partnerships with Iraqi families in ways that respect and honor their beliefs and guiding principles.

**Hijrah.** In intentionally pursuing research with Iraqi refugees, it is important to note that, within Islam, refugees share a fundamental understanding of *hijrah*, or migration, which includes the migration or journey in search of refuge and protection (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003). According to the Islamic concept of *hijrah*, Muslims who are not free to exercise their basic rights have a duty to flee elsewhere if it is impossible for them to escape oppression (p. 6). This perspective of migration within an Islamic context may provide further understanding of the migration experiences for Muslim refugees. Acknowledgement of an Iraqi mother’s perspective of *hijrah* in the individual story of each refugee may support educational leaders in addressing concerns or identifying opportunities to support the needs of each family.

**Religious considerations in the classroom.** Recognition of the religious, ethnic, and cultural plurality of Iraqi communities is crucial to understanding the refugee
families that are present in public schools (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003). Maloof and Ross-Sheriff (2003) stated that Muslim refugee children must negotiate the following four sets of values: 1) his or her family’s culture, 2) U.S. cultural norms as learned within the context of the education system, 3) the culture communicated by peers and the mass media, and 4) the teachings of Islam (p. 33). They further described how refugee children “may experience prejudice or hostility at school, largely because they are foreign-born, are refugees, have a different appearance, and may have language constraints” (p. 34). The negative public stereotypes about Muslims often exacerbate this.

Maloof and Ross-Sheriff (2003) noted that children of refugees often adapt more quickly to life in the U.S. than their parents, however many of the children have a difficult burden in being expected to function in two different environments - “the home environment, which reflects the religious and cultural norms of the countries of origin of their parents, and the school and neighborhood environment, with influences from peers and teachers reflecting American cultural norms” (p. 22). These differing environmental expectations signal a need for both parents and educators to build partnerships that allow for accommodations that facilitate the healthy development of Muslim refugee children. Without an understanding and awareness of the complex dynamics that shape the experiences of Iraqi refugee families, educators may struggle to communicate with and develop relationships with parents of this diverse culture and religious background.
Communication between High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

To fully consider the cultural implications for Iraqi refugee families in the U.S., it is important to unpack the notion of communication within a high-context culture. The concept of high-context and low-context cultural communication emerged from research conducted by Hall and Hall (1990), who showed that there are similarities and differences in the communication styles between different cultures. Cultures around the world were categorized as being low-context or high-context based upon the predominant communication style within the culture.

In order to build some background knowledge surrounding what Hall and Hall (1990) referred to when describing high and low-context culture communication, it is important to establish some working definitions. Culture is frequently defined as the shared behaviors, customs, or beliefs of a group of people (Nishimura, Nevgi, & Tella, 2009; Trumbull et al., 2001). In other words, culture is the shared social construction of the norms and roles of a community and is inclusive of material elements, customs, observable patterns of behavior, and ideational elements such as “ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and ways of acquiring knowledge and passing it on” (Trumbull et al., 2001, p. 1). Context, as defined by Hall and Hall (1990), is the “information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of the event” (p. 6). These definitions lay the foundation for understanding context and culture in conjunction with communication. As Table 2 illustrates, there are explicit differences in communication between high and low-context cultures, which will be detailed in the following sections.
Table 2

Comparison of High and Low Context Communication Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-Context Culture (Iraq)</th>
<th>Low-Context Culture (U.S.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relationship Oriented</td>
<td>• Task Oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intuitive and Relational</td>
<td>• Linear and Logical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Values Group Achievement</td>
<td>• Values Individual Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-verbal communication used as much or more than verbal communication</td>
<td>• Verbal communication preferred over non-verbal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication highly reliant on surrounding context</td>
<td>• Communication highly reliant on the written and spoken word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Silence and what is not explicitly stated is equally as important as what is said</td>
<td>• Precise and direct words are most valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decisions focus around personal relationship and are often made by a central person who has authority in the group.</td>
<td>• Decisions are made based upon what needs to be done dividing responsibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References: (Hall & Hall, 1990; Nishimura et al., 2009; Qingxue, 2003; Westbrook, 2014)

As Table 2 denotes, Iraq as an Arab culture is largely viewed as a high-context culture while the mainstream culture within the U.S. is typically labeled as low-context (Qingxue, 2003). The divergent communication styles between many educators in the U.S. and Iraqi families highlights the importance of understanding the potential communication barriers and how educators can overcome these barriers to build authentic partnerships with Iraqi mothers.

**High-context cultural communication.** Within high-context cultures like Iraq, information is often communicated through the surrounding context, including the use of gestures, space, silence, a person’s social standing, family background, and affiliations (Qingxue, 2003). This means that not everything is explicitly stated, and the listener is expected to “read ‘between the lines’ to understand the unsaid,” as greater confidence is
placed upon non-verbal aspects of communication than on the verbal aspects (Nishimura et al., 2009, p. 785). For example, within qualitative research, the context surrounding human experience is crucial as the phenomena cannot be adequately understood if they are separated from those spaces (Aneas & Sandin, 2009). Similarly, communication within high-context cultures is ineffective when words spoken are not taken into consideration within the context surrounding them (Qingxue, 2003). High-context cultures are typically reflective of collectivist ideals and value group harmony over individualism (Nishimura et al.).

**Low-context cultural communication.** Low-context cultures like the mainstream U.S. tend to communicate explicitly, meaning that everything needs to be stated clearly as they rely heavily on verbal communication as their main information channel (Qingxue, 2003). People communicating within a low-context culture typically expect explanations when something is unclear and prefer direct, precise, and open communication (Nishimura et al., 2009). Low-context cultures, due to their direct and blunt communication, risk insulting high-context cultures when asking questions that may seem polite but are considered too personal or offensive. Individualism or prioritizing individual needs over the needs of the group is typically valued in low-context cultures (Nishimura et al.).

**Implications for educators.** The communication differences between high and low-context cultures have significant implications for communication between educators in the U.S. working with Iraqi refugee families and their ability to form successful partnerships. For example, educators coming from low-context cultures may expect all
parents to communicate their needs in a detailed and clear-cut manner and may feel uncomfortable with vague and ambiguous conversations that may occur with a parent coming from a high-context culture, risking the assumption that the parent is unwilling to collaborate (Qingxue, 2003). Conversely, a parent coming from a high-context culture may view an educator who only relies on verbal messages for information as less credible as they believe that silence often sends a better message than words (Qingxue, 2003). Hall and Hall (1990) provided another example of high and low-context communication conflict when they said “high-context people are apt to become impatient and irritated when low-context people insist on giving them information they don’t need” (p. 9). By acknowledging the differences in communication approaches between high and low-context cultures, educators have a greater ability to avoid misunderstandings with parents. “Looking for meaning and understanding in what is not said – in the nonverbal communication or body language, in the silences and pauses, in relationships and empathy,” educators will be better able to build successful partnerships with Iraqi refugee families in the U.S. (Qingxue, 2003, p. 24). With a better understanding of Iraqi mothers’ perceptions of her role in education and how culture may impact her perceptions, educators may begin taking steps toward this end.

**Bridging the Culture Gap with Iraqi Refugee Families**

Iraqi refugees, as a culturally, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically marginalized population within the U.S., are at risk of falling into the culture gap that can impact academic achievement (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). According to Gay (2013), culture gaps occur when the ethnic backgrounds of students and the culture of the
schools they attend are not aligned. In being a minority population within U.S. public schools, the culture and values of Iraqi families are not visibly reflected, indicating that the culture gap will persist unless educators proactively respond to the growing need to partner with Iraqi refugee families. Culture gaps impact student achievement and present institutional barriers for linguistically and culturally diverse students in mainstream schools within the U.S. (Gabriel, 2011; Gay, 2013; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Gay (2013) suggested that, to improve the performance of underachieving students from diverse ethnic groups, a very different pedagogical paradigm is needed – one that teaches to and through the cultural strengths, intellectual capabilities, and prior accomplishments of each student, bringing the role of culture to the foreground of teaching and learning. Educators will be better equipped to meet the unique needs of an Iraqi refugee student if they form authentic partnerships with their mother, uncovering how she perceives her role within the schooling process and how culture may impact her partnerships with educators. Bridging the culture gap will begin when educators intentionally combat the pervasive ideologies that perpetuate marginalization by shifting focus to view parents through an asset-based lens. The following section provides an overview of the deficit paradigm, illustrates the role power plays in marginalizing minority families, examines the capital Iraqi refugee families possess, and suggests the need to affirm and unite with Iraqi families in order to bridge the cultural gap present in contemporary schooling.
The Deficit Perspective

One of the most significant obstacles that reinforce the culture gap between mainstream and minority populations is the persistence of the deficit perspective and the failure of educational leaders to recognize and address the fact that deficit attitudes perpetuate the marginalization of vulnerable populations within our schools (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). The deficit perspective is a pervasive ideology in dominant discourse about education that attributes a student’s lack of success to a family’s cultural and linguistic background (Hambacher & Thompson, 2015). Gorski (2008) described a deficit perspective as the way in which students are defined by their weaknesses rather than their strengths. As Yosso (2005) explained, “deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (p. 75). A deficit paradigm builds upon stereotypes and overlooks systemic inequities, reinforcing negative perceptions about students and their families (Gorski, 2008).

Contemporary research has demonstrated a concern that educators may have lower expectations for students of color due to the differences they have culturally and linguistically from the mainstream population (Gabriel, 2011; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Sadly, these negative perceptions and habit of blaming socioeconomic status, language, and culture on the widening achievement gap for minority students have persisted for a long time (Good, 2010; Hambacher & Thompson, 2015). Similarly, research as it relates to family engagement has shown that “many educators assume that
lack of parental participation is evidence of lack of parental interest” (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 8). Quiocho and Daoud’s (2005) research found that parents wanted to be more involved in their child’s education, however they felt excluded and that teachers may have had misconceptions about their role and ability to support their child’s education. While educators and parents may have differing interpretations of what constitutes effective parental engagement through a traditional and non-traditional lens, a deficit perspective towards minority families will result in the failure of educators to recognize the important role parents play in a child’s education (Good, 2010).

**Power and privilege.** Furthering the negative impact of the deficit perspective are the elements of power and privilege. In education, Moll (2010) explained that power and privilege is transmitted through social relations, representations, and practices that determine whose language and cultural experiences are most highly valued and whose are not which therefore places some students in a favorable position at the center and leaves others on the periphery. This supports Podesta’s (2014) research that alluded to the fact that, when individuals in education “define which social practices are more valued, and employ strategies to dominate, exercise power, access resources and acquire influence,” inequity is created (Podesta, 2014, p. 124). Lee and Bowen (2006) explained that middle-class, educated European American families possess the most advantage within education as they experience a lifestyle congruent with the dominant culture of most American schools and engage in involvement activities most valued by the school or more strongly associated with student achievement. Students who already encounter vulnerabilities within their life circumstance are harmed by the effects of the power differential in
education, dominant ideologies like the deficit perspective, and the systemic mechanisms within schools that reinforce them (Chinnery, 2015; Glass, 2007). Iraqi refugee students, vulnerable not only due to their background, are at risk of further marginalization from power disparities present in contemporary schooling.

**Shifting perspectives.** Educators have the opportunity to reverse the effects of the deficit perspective through the nurturing of authentic relationships that are founded upon mutual trust and respect and the fostering of authentic partnerships that give parents and educators an equal voice in the educational process (Epstein, 2009; Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Santana et al., 2016). In order to foster positive relationships between educators and families, studies have indicated that open communication and mutual collaboration supports family engagement (Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Bringing the aspect of trust into the spotlight, Bryk and Schneider (2002) reminded educators that trust is essential in developing authentic partnerships, noting that educators who trusted parents within the educational process were more likely to have higher levels of student achievement.

Overcoming the deficit perspective will enable educators to engage in authentic partnerships with parents that are founded upon a belief system that acknowledges that *all* families are capable and willing to do anything they can to understand, support, and encourage their child(ren)’s educational experience and academic achievement (Nieto & Bode, 2012). In order to transform ideologies and belief systems entrenched within the deficit paradigm, Moll (2010) suggested that educators must first overcome the barrier of an internal belief system that identifies with a deficit perspective of families and shift
towards a paradigm that views parents as an asset to their child’s educational success (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Good, 2015; Hambacher & Thompson, 2015). Within the context of this study, shifting from a deficit view to an asset-based perspective requires educators to examine the experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers with a lens that acknowledges the cultural capital they possess as well as an understanding of how capital may impact her perspective of the partnership she has with her child’s school.

**Capital, Affirmation, and Solidarity**

To effectively combat the deficit perspective, an asset-based perspective must be employed which takes into account the capital a family holds. All families, including Iraqi refugee families, possess funds of knowledge which according to Gabriel (2011), are the “resources students and their families have that often go unnoticed, unobserved, or untapped as ways of contributing to the academic learning process available to underserved students in public school settings” (p. 55). Within educational literature, these resources are typically described through the concept of capital, a model developed by Bourdieu in an attempt to explain the ways in which social inequities are reproduced throughout the educational system (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) identified the following three forms of capital: economic capital (financial resources), social capital (networks and relational resources), and cultural capital (resources in the form of knowledge, skills, and tradition). Contemporary research, through a critical race theory lens, has shifted away from a predominant deficit view of capital coming from the perspectives of “White, middle class culture to the cultures of Communities of Color” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). By centering the research lens on the experiences of people of
color, research has acknowledged the importance of accumulated assets and resources in the form of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) The notions of cultural capital are especially important when trying to understand the experiences and perspectives of Iraqi refugee families.

**Cultural capital.** Cultural capital, according to Lee and Bowen (2006), exists in the following three forms: “personal dispositions, attitudes, and knowledge gained from experience; connections to education-related objects (e.g., books, computers, academic credentials), and connections to education-related institutions (e.g., schools, universities, libraries)” (p. 197). Lee and Bowen suggested that, the more cultural capital individuals have, the more advantage they have to procure additional capital. The cultural capital a family possesses will in turn reflect the power they have in terms of their children’s education (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

For families of diverse backgrounds who have not assimilated into mainstream ideals of parent involvement practices, engagement may vary depending upon their financial resources, educational knowledge, and confidence in navigating the school system (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Lee and Bowen (2006) illustrated this notion of cultural capital for minority families in the following statement:

Parents with low levels of education, for example, may be less involved at school because they feel less confident about communicating with school staff owing to a lack of knowledge of the school system, a lack of familiarity with educational jargon, or their own negative educational experiences. Or parents from different cultures may value home educational involvement more than involvement at school. While these variations in habitus may result in some parents having less cultural capital vis-à-vis the school, the same parents may still be actively involved at home in one or more ways consistent with the values and practices of the school system. (p. 198)
This research suggested that, while Iraqi refugee families may possess less conventional cultural capital than the mainstream culture in the U.S., they may still be involved within their children’s education in ways that are meaningful to the family.

Under the umbrella of cultural capital, critical race theorists have looked at capital through an asset lens and acknowledged that communities of color actually nurture cultural wealth through the following six forms of cultural capital: social, linguistic, familial, navigational, resistant, and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) explained that each of the various forms of capital are “not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth” (p. 77). Each form of capital thus overlaps and is important within the context of Iraqi refugee families.

**Social capital.** Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), represents a network of relationships or the membership within a group that provides each of its members the backing of the collectively owned capital. For Iraqi families, social capital is an important dynamic as Iraqi culture is typically reflective of a collectivist culture, meaning interdependence is valued and emphasized within social goals of “loyalty to family, respect for elders, politeness, and responsibility for social and cognitive domains” (Trumbull et al., 2001, p. 272). Within a collectivist culture, there is an emphasis on group identity, interdependence of the group, and a social responsibility of every member to the group (Trumbull et al., 2001). Bourdieu alluded to the fact that the profits that accrue due to social capital are a result of the solidarity or cohesion of the family unit.
Echoing Bourdieu’s connection between positive partnerships and improved student outcomes, Henderson et al. (2007) explained that student achievement rises as relationship between families and schools transform into authentic partnerships. If cohesion of a family unit produces positive outcomes, then authentic partnerships between families and schools should in turn positively impact student achievement. When families are positively engaged in their child’s learning, rather than labeled as a problem, schools are transformed into places where all children prosper (Henderson et al., 2007). As Delgado-Gaitan (2001) confirmed, “families transcend the adversity in their daily lives by uniting with supportive social networks” (p. 105). In the context of this research dissertation, research surrounding social capital suggested that student academic outcomes increase when the social capital of each family is supported through relationships that unify educators and families. Thus, building authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee families would likely increase the social capital each family has and thus increases the potential resources the family has to support their child’s education.

**Linguistic capital.** Linguistic capital is a form of cultural wealth that emerged from research that supported the value of bilingual education and underscored the relationship between racialized cultural history and language (Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital is inclusive of the intellectual and social skills acquired through experiences communicating in more than one language (Yosso, 2005). As the majority of Iraqi families’ primary language is Arabic, leveraging the family’s linguistic capital will be important for effective communication.
**Familial capital.** Familial capital acknowledges that wealth is nurtured through a sense of community, history, memory, and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). Kinship ties with immediate family members and with extended family are all crucial within the family unit as through this capital the emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness is fostered and raised (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) explained that this form of capital protects students and their families from experiencing isolation as they are connected with others around them in similar circumstances which provides reassurance that they are not alone. As familial capital often extends outside of a child’s immediate family, educators may be able to extend their support of a child when building relationships with and considering the impact of all family members that support a child academically.

**Navigational capital.** Navigational capital is something that is extremely important to consider in the context of Iraqi refugee families as navigational capital refers to the skills and strategies a family possesses that support them in maneuvering through social institutions that were not created with them in mind (Yosso, 2005). Resilience has been connected to a family’s navigational capital and is reflected within “inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning” (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 229). Iraqi refugee families, having experienced the trauma of displacement from their homes, have had to utilize navigational capital in order to successfully maneuver through the U.S. public school system.
**Resistant capital.** Resistant capital refers to the knowledge and skills that are fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005). Research surrounding resistant capital has shown that parents of color often teach their children to consciously engage in behaviors and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo, essentially teaching them to oppose race, gender, and class inequities they face with thoughts and actions (Yosso, 2005). Resistance capital for Iraqi refugees may be seen within their ability to recognize the racial and ethnic discrimination they face as an Arab community and their resistance against structural inequities that may be present in their life. Within education, oppressive structures that may impact Iraqi families could include deficit perspectives and low expectations.

**Aspirational capital.** Finally, aspirational capital is the ability for families to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, despite the presence of real or perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005). In having already overcome so many obstacles within their life, Iraqi families in U.S. schools possess a significant amount of aspirational capital that enables them to dream of the possibilities beyond their present circumstances. To further help Iraqi families build aspirational capital, educators could help to identify the goals each individual family has for their child’s academic achievement and connect them with the resources to help them achieve this future.

**Affirmation and solidarity.** Nieto (1994) discussed the importance of affirmation and solidarity within engagement, premised with the assumption that each student and their family have differences. These differences should be “embraced and accepted as legitimate vehicles for learning” and support should thus be extended based
upon the needs of the family (p. 5). Furthermore, this idea of affirmation and solidarity is, according to Nieto, based upon the understanding that “culture is not a fixed or unchangeable artifact” and “passively accepting the status quo of any culture” or “simply substituting one myth for another contradicts its basic assumptions because no group is inherently superior” to any other (p. 6). In other words, while minority families may not engage in education the way the dominant culture demands, the engagement practices of each family are likely consistent with their cultural values and should be validated and embraced in solidarity.

Quisumbing (2017) described solidarity as the mutual respect for individual uniqueness and a deep appreciation for common humanity. Values, according to Quisumbing, transcend the barriers of culture, race, gender, and creed as they can reveal common goals or understandings that will support educators in bridging the culture gap. Solidarity honors the common humanity and unifies educators and parents through this recognition of shared values. Through this notion of affirmation and solidarity, partnerships between educators and Iraqi refugee families will rise as educators recognize and affirm the strengths of each family, validating the perspectives of each mother, and finding the common ground upon which to build positive relationships that will better support Iraqi refugee children in U.S. schools. Furthermore, “when students witness the validation of their culture and language, hence of themselves, within the educational process, when the ‘see themselves’ in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities with an academic identity” (p. 456). Bringing voice to the experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers will not only affirm that educators value
partnerships with Iraqi families, but will validate Iraqi refugee students through a demonstration of reverence for their background and culture, thus narrowing the cultural gap between the family and the educational potential of the student.

**Summary**

As this review of literature reveals, educational researchers have long been advocating the benefits of authentic partnerships between families, schools, and communities as a way to improve student achievement outcomes (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Partnerships with families have been encouraged as a way to ensure all students succeed academically and emerged out of a need for shared responsibility and increased understanding between families and schools (Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Kammen et al., 2014). Although the literature presented the benefits of creating partnerships with diverse families, research has not yet compelled widespread changes in contemporary education practices, and without a greater understanding of the diverse cultures present in U.S. classrooms, educators are still limited in their ability to leverage authentic partnerships with parents to improve student achievement outcomes (Bauman et al., 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

To build the contextual foundation for this study, this literature review started by introducing three important theories that have shaped modern perspectives of parent engagement. Traditional and non-traditional aspects of involvement were explored, followed by an in-depth look at the cultural considerations educators need to be mindful of when working with Iraqi refugee families. The last section discussed pervasive ideologies such as the deficit perspective that perpetuate the marginalization of Iraqi
refugees, and research was introduced suggested the power to overcome these beliefs comes through an intentional ideological shift towards a perspective that validates the social and cultural capital each family has to support positive educational outcomes for their child. Finally, the literature identified the influence affirmation and solidarity have in bridging the culture gap for minority families through a recognition of shared values that have the potential to build meaningful relationships with individual families.

Missing within the literature were the perspective of what constitutes authentic parent and educator partnerships and how culture may shape these relationships, particularly from the point of view of Iraqi refugee mothers. Despite the rising numbers of Iraqi refugees within classrooms across the U.S., there was little research allowing mothers to share their voice regarding the unique context surrounding their lives and experiences within the U.S. educational system. As mothers play a vital role in the education of their children, the voices of Iraqi mothers have the potential to reveal perceptions surrounding parent engagement and the way culture may influence authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee families. Thus, in order to fill this gap within the literature, this dissertation seeks to uncover how Iraqi refugee mothers define their role within their child’s education, explore how culture may shape these experiences, and reveal the nature of the partnerships that are formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers within the cultural spaces that are relevant to each family. The following chapter will explore the methodological approach used within this study, qualitative inquiry, and how this approach helped to build a deeper understanding of parental engagement of Iraqi refugee families from the unique perspectives of Iraqi refugee mothers.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To meaningfully capture the experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers in the United States, this research study was built upon the primary research question: How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their children's education in the United States? To further examine and understand these experiences, the following sub-questions were raised: How does culture influence Iraqi refugee mothers' experiences of parent engagement? What is the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers?

With an objective of research “focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied,” this research fully embraced the qualitative tradition (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 1). The epistemological approach that was employed to investigate these questions centered around social constructionism (Crotty, 1998). Within this approach lies my belief that meaning is constructed through the culture and context of the participants’ experiences. Through this study, I sought to embrace a theoretical perspective most closely aligned to critical inquiry. Qualitatively and inductively driven, this research is distinguished through its narrative case study methodological approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clough, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Riessman, 2008; Stake, 1995). In this chapter, I will discuss the qualitative research
design, epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods I used to address the research questions and problem of the inquiry. Finally, this chapter will end with discussions of trustworthiness, data analysis, and concluding thoughts.

**Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Merriam (1998) defined qualitative research as an “umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) furthered this explanation when stating that qualitative researchers “are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p.6). In other words, qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2007). Within a focus on understanding meaning through the contextualized experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers, this research required a qualitative design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In sharp contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research assumes that “meaning is embedded in people’s experiences and that this meaning is mediated through the investigator’s own perceptions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Merriam (1998) revealed that greater understanding emerges from the perspective of the participant, not that of the researcher. These contrasting perspectives in qualitative research are often “referred to as the *emic*, or insider’s perspective, versus the *etic*, or outsider’s view” and are largely based upon beliefs and cultural values (p. 7). Inductively driven, qualitative research primarily focuses on “process, meaning, and understanding” which results in richly
Consistent with Nieto and Bode’s (2012) approach to qualitative research through a multicultural lens, an essential element in uncovering parent engagement of Iraqi mothers is bringing to light the context of their experiences: who they are, how they identify themselves, what their families are like, the values they hold dear, and their desires for their children and hopes for their future. Data within educational research is often reflected quantitatively, however as Wagner et al. (2006) discussed, numbers are limited in their ability to reveal the experiences that emerge through qualitative data. Wagner et al. (2006) stated:

Seeing the faces, and hearing the stories, hopes, and opinions of those in our own community moves us emotionally, reminds us of the moral imperative behind our work, and enables us to see the information as living in three dimensions instead of just one. The stories, the faces, and the voices remain with us with an insistency that numbers can rarely inspire. Above all, more and better data can help us define the various challenges related to improving students’ learning, and track the vitality of our change effort. (p. 135)

The voices and stories of Iraqi mothers within this research are essential in understanding how they perceive parent engagement and their role in their child’s education in the U.S., understanding how culture influences their experiences of parent engagement, and the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers.

**Epistemology: Constructionism**

In order to make meaning of Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement, this research was pursued from an epistemological stance of constructionism. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism is the view that “all
knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Within a constructionist view, there is an essential relationship between human experience and the context that surrounds it; the context cannot be adequately described in isolation from the human experience nor can human experience be captured without context (Crotty, 1998).

Within this epistemological framework, it is important to make the distinction between constructivism and constructionism. According to Crotty (1998), constructivism emphasizes individualistic understandings that focus “exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” whereas constructionism is inclusive of “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 58). With a focus on the constructions of meaning and knowledge within the social context of parent engagement experiences, this research fit the views prescribed within constructionism (Crotty, 1998).

Through a constructionist lens, this research acknowledged that participants’ experiences were shaped by the culture surrounding them and that their experiences could not be seen in isolation from culture. Constructionism holds that descriptions of humans making meaning and engaging in the world can be misleading if not situated within a genuine historical, social, and cultural context (Crotty, 1998). Social constructionism emphasizes culture, which according to Crotty (1998), is a direct consequence of human evolution as we rely on culture to organize our experiences and direct our behavior. Constructionists thus hold that culture has a significant impact on the way we see, feel,
and experience the world around us (Crotty, 1998). To intentionally seek understanding about Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement in education and how culture may impact these experiences validated the cultural lens through which my participants perceived parent engagement.

**Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Feminism**

This research explored Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement from a critical race feminist perspective. According to Verjee (2012), critical race feminism “seeks to understand how society organizes itself along intersections of race, gender, class, and other forms of social hierarchies” (p. 1). As Yosso (2005) suggested, “critical race theory starts from the premise that race and racism are central, endemic, permanent, and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how U.S. society functions” (p. 73). Building upon this with a feminist perspective, a critical race feminist researcher utilizes counter-storytelling to legitimize and give voice to the experiences of women of color (Verjee, 2013). With stories having the ability to advance privilege through majoritarian narratives, Creswell (2013) argued that “counterstories by people of color can help to shatter complacency that may accompany such privilege and challenge the dominant discourses that serve to suppress” those who are marginalized (p. 31). Given the complexities and racialized tensions present within Iraqi refugee experiences (Ghareeb et al., 2008), it is important to acknowledge the deeply embedded racism present within U.S. society and the impact this may have on the experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers (Creswell, 2013).
Within a theoretical framework centered around critical inquiry, context was a crucial component of the research inquiry as were the relationships between power and culture (Crotty, 1998). In giving voice to issues surrounding social justice, critical inquiry brought awareness to forces of hegemony and injustice while taking into account how lives are mediated by institutionalized inequity such as sexism, classism, and racism (Crotty, 1998; Lather, 1991; Lather, 2004). Critical researchers hold a belief that there are no culture-free, trans-historical, disinterested ways of knowing (Lather, 2004), and while there may not be a way to achieve pure social justice, freedom, and equity, the struggle towards that end is worthwhile (Crotty, 1998).

Through a critical race feminist lens (CRF), the research inquiry maintained an intentional focus on “connecting meaning to broader structures of social power, control, and history” while pursuing research methods that were reciprocal, interactive, dialogic, and “work toward transformative action and egalitarian participation” (Lather, 2004, p. 209). In pursuing research with a vulnerable and marginalized population, it was important to speak with participants as opposed to for the participants. By placing Iraqi mothers at the center of the research inquiry, I not only gave my participants ownership over their own experiences but decentered myself, the researcher, as the master of truth and justice and holder of power within the inquiry (Lather, 2004).

Furthermore, recognition of the ways in which the factors of race, gender, and culture shaped Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences should not be looked at in isolation of each other. Crenshaw (1991) suggested that when looking at the intersectionality of how these factors overlap within the structural, political, and representational aspects of the
participant’s experiences, research has the ability to paint a fuller picture and transform the way we understand the experiences of each participant. Strictly pursuing research through a feminist lens, Crenshaw argued, may politicize experiences of women and may not recognize how race interacts with gendered experiences. Factors of race, gender, and culture are not mutually exclusive and need to be looked at with regard to the structural intersectionality which is the way in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender may experience the same situation differently than white women (Crenshaw, 1991). Consideration of political intersectionality is important to recognize as it requires an intentional look at how feminist and antiracist politics may have the unintended consequence of marginalizing the experiences of women of color (Crenshaw). Finally, representational intersectionality is especially important to recognize within this research as it acknowledges the popular cultures construction of Iraqi refugee women and the implications this may have in disempowering the participants (Crenshaw). Through a lens validating the intersectionality of the participants lives, I hoped to support the reconceptualization of this community of women as well as confront the ways in which they may be marginalized in education.

Constructing meaning through a critical race feminist lens, while recognizing the impact of intersectionality, brought perspective to the specific experiences of women, their ways of knowing, and the power imbalances present within a patriarchal culture (Crenshaw, 1991; Crotty, 1998; Lather, 2004). According to Lather (1991), the ideological goal of feminist research in social sciences is to “correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social
position” (p. 71). Unlike traditional qualitative frameworks, Bloom (1998) suggested that a feminist perspective “promises a more interpersonal and reciprocal relationship between researchers and those whose lives are the focus of the research” (p. 1). Critical race methodology in education provides a way to understand the experiences of people of color by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Utilizing a critical race feminist theoretical framework allowed for an examination of the way race, gender, and culture shaped Iraqi refugee mother’s experiences of parent engagement and informed and challenged dominant ideologies of schooling and parent engagement practices that implicitly privilege white, U.S. born, monolingual, English speaking students and their parents (Yosso, 2005).

**Methodology: Narrative Case Study**

As Donmoyer (1990) wrote, “case studies can take us to places where most of us would not have an opportunity to go” (p. 61). Given the specific, complex, and bounded context of the research problem, the methodological tenets of case study provided an integrated approach to revealing the nature of Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement (Stake, 1995). According to Merriam (1998), case studies differ from other types of qualitative research through intensive descriptions and a focus within a bounded system such as a person, group, or community. Case study methodology has been commonly utilized within educational research and is particularly useful within educational inquiries given the focus on holistic description and the inseparability between the context and variables explored (Merriam, 1998).
Through a utilization of narrative case study as a methodology, research participants were encouraged to share their experiences through their contextualized stories, and thus the “particular histories of individuals are preserved, resulting in an accumulation of detail that could be assembled into a “fuller” picture of the individual or group” (Riessman, 2008). According to Riessman (2008), narratives prompt readers to think beyond the surface of a text and move toward a broader commentary which gives opportunity for transferability within narrative research. According to Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012), a narrative approach is particularly suited to educational studies with research questions that center around exploring the experiences of individuals or groups of individuals. Briggs et al. (2012) attested that “the narrative approach aims to illuminate a person’s lived experiences and ‘can give a uniquely rich and subtle understanding of life situations’” (p. 225). Clough (2002) explained that narratives are useful in educational research as they open a “deeper view of life in familiar contexts: it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar…stories can provide a means by which truths, which cannot be otherwise told, are uncovered” (p 8). Narrative case studies within education are needed and have the ability to contribute to the knowledge of educational leaders in a way that quantitative research cannot (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012).

Further justification for the use of narrative centers around the centrality of *experience* within the research inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed how *experience* is a key term within diverse inquiries and explained that embedded within experiences are behaviors that reflect expressions of an individual’s story within a
particular context and time. As Clandinin and Connelly said, “*experiencing the experience* is a reminder for us that narrative inquiry is aimed at understanding and *making* meaning of experience. This is the baseline ‘why’ for social science inquiry” (p. 80, emphasis in original).

Within this research inquiry, it was important to consider the “characters who were living the stories, the characters who were telling the stories, the times at which stories were lived, the times stories were told, the places in which stories were lived and told, and so on” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 25). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience provided a foundational place in which to understand our thinking about the three dimensions of the inquiry space: “*personal and social* (interaction); *past, present, and future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation)” (p. 50, emphasis in original). The dimensions of interaction focus on the internal and existential conditions of the inquiry space. In other words, interaction frames the personal and social environment, including the feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the characters. Continuity within the research space acknowledges temporality or the past, present, and future and how they relate to the character. The situation encompasses the notion of place which attends to the specific and concrete physical boundary of the inquiry landscape (Clandinin, 2013). Within this study, the notion of place may include in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences, depending on the lived experiences of each participant. Framing the inquiry through these three dimensions acknowledges that there is a relationship between each character and the context that surrounds them. Consideration of the context present
within the inquiry space revealed a range of perspectives and angles from which to understand each participant’s experience, perspectives we might not have seen within the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives (Gorski & Pothni, 2014).

Utilizing narrative inquiry, this study was not intended to turn the stories of Iraqi refugee mothers into data that would “test or verify theoretical propositions and thereby produce knowledge that can be received by others” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). Instead, as Bochner and Riggs (2014) explained, the true objective of narrative inquiry is to “link theory to story by inviting others to think and feel with the story, staying with it, resonating with the story’s moral dilemmas, identifying with its ambiguities, examining its contradictions, feeling its nuances, letting the story analyze them” (p. 207). Through this lens, it was possible to look at the stories of each mother within a framework of my own life, taking each story to heart, and considering the ethical and moral commitment the stories inspired (Bochner & Riggs). As an educator, I am committed to supporting my students learning and often pursue this task by providing relevant and authentic opportunities that meet the needs of individual students. Similarly, as a researcher I have a commitment to help educators build successful partnerships with Iraqi refugee families, and in using narrative inquiry, I had the ability to help educators make connections to Iraqi refugee families and students through the stories of the mothers.

Methods

According to Tracy (2010), high-quality qualitative research is marked by a rich complexity or abundance. This study sought to pursue a high level of rigor and pushed beyond notions of convenience and opportunism (Tracy, 2010). To ensure rigor, the
following methods were used to construct meaning and understandings relevant to the inquiry (Schwandt, 2007). The use of multiple sources and methods helped to increase the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following section details the methods that were used and describes in detail how data were collected and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry and research of parent engagement experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers (Merriam, 1995).

**Sampling**

To gain authentic and in-depth knowledge of each participant’s experience, this research design utilized a small sample of five participants. The tension between quantitative and qualitative perspectives within research are often reflected within the notion of sample size and generalizability in research (Morrow, 2005). When thinking about the concept of generalizability within qualitative research and the sample size within the study, it was important to remember that a primary goal was “to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many” (Merriam, 1995, p. 57). Participants were selected based upon their ability to maximize learning about the research questions. Through intensive focus on the experiences of a few, this research offers educators an understanding of Iraqi mothers’ experiences, and as Donmoyer (1990) termed, an “enriched conception of schooling” which is the ability of an educator to “look at schools in his own society in a new way: he should be able both to see different things and to see differently things he has seen before” (p. 62). In other words, this research hopes to give educators a different lens through which to view the experiences of Iraqi refugee families in U.S. schools.
Participants. The participants within this study included five Iraqi refugee mothers, two who were living in the Western U.S. and three who were living in Eastern U.S. at the time the study was conducted. Selecting participants that were resettled in the Western U.S. and Eastern U.S. provided a valuable opportunity to gain perspectives from mothers who had differing perceptions and experiences due to their resettlement location. Table 3 provides general resettlement information about each participant, including their chosen pseudonym, year of displacement from Iraq, country of refuge, year of resettlement to the U.S., and general location of resettlement.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Native Location in Iraq</th>
<th>Year Displaced From Iraq</th>
<th>Country of Refuge</th>
<th>Year of U.S Resettlement</th>
<th>Location of Resettlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mariam</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Western U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amel</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Western U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manal</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Eastern U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Eastern U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 3, three out of the five participants were displaced for at least two years prior to resettlement in the U.S. The other two participants were not displaced outside of Iraq’s borders prior to being granted refugee status. Of note, the three participants who were resettled between 2008 and 2009 were all resettled to the Eastern U.S. and the two participants were resettled between 2013 and 2014 were resettled in the Western U.S. In order to identify these five participants from the larger Iraqi refugee population in the Western and Eastern U.S., I used a purposeful sampling approach.
**Purposeful sampling.** Purposeful sampling is used when a researcher seeks to discover, understand, and gain insight about some phenomena, requiring the selection of a sample that allows for maximum learning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To add “depth and detail to make interpretation more meaningful and grounded,” as Patton (2015) suggested, this study utilized purposeful sampling to identify Iraqi refugee mothers within a larger group of Arab and Islamic women (p. 303). To begin identifying participants, I initiated conversations with many of my Arab friends at the local mosque and state university, asking them if they knew of any Iraqi refugee mothers of school age children who fit my selection criteria and may be open to learning more about participation within my research. Once I had word that there was a potential participant, I asked my contact to reach out to the participant to help build a connection and to inquire about their interest and ability to participate in the study. When a participant indicated to my contact that they were willing and interested to hear more about my study, I then reached out to them and arranged a phone or in-person conversation so that I could provide them with more details about the study and to determine if they met the selection criteria.

In the beginning, my search for participants was limited to the Western region of the U.S. and many of the potential participants that my contacts identified were not willing to participate in the study. I reached out to every person working with Iraqi refugee populations within two hours of where I lived but came to learn that many of the refugees in the western U.S. had been resettled within the last four to five years and were still extremely vulnerable and fearful of sharing information with someone outside of
their direct community. I was eventually invited to a meeting for mothers in the Arabic community at a local school by one of my contacts. My contact introduced me to all of the mothers during the meeting, explained about my search for willing participants, and invited interested mothers to meet with me after the meeting to hear more specifics about participation in my study. After the meeting, two of the four women who had come to learn about my study fit the selection criteria and agreed to participate in my study. After finding only two participants in the West who fit my selection criteria and were willing to participate in the study, I revised my IRB to expand my participant search area to include the Eastern U.S. Once I expanded my search area to include the Eastern U.S., my contacts were able to quickly identify several potential participants who were open and willing to participate within this study, thus leading me to the final three participants in this study.

The initial contact with the potential participants was guided by a general script that provided an overview of the study and a launching point for determining participant eligibility and interest, however the method of contact differed depending on the location of the participants. The Western participants had the opportunity to meet with me in person while the participants in the Eastern U.S. learned about the study over the phone. In order to connect me with a potential participant, my contact in the East would call me as soon as she found someone who may be willing to participate, and I would speak with both my contact and the potential participant on the phone to answer any questions they had, determine if they met the selection criteria, and coordinate the time for our next conversation and in-person meetings.
**Selection criteria.** As Creswell (2013) indicated, within a narrative study, participants are chosen thoughtfully and with regard to not only convenience but to a participant’s depth of experience relating to the research inquiry which in this case is the nature of Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences with parent engagement. Due to the nature of this research and the need to find participants that will yield the greatest amount of data, this study included the following selection criteria that was required of all participants: (1) Iraqi mother who came to the U.S. as a refugee; (2) Iraqi refugee mother who had one or more children enrolled in school in any grade ranging from Pre-K to twelfth; (3) Iraqi refugee mother who had a child enrolled in a U.S. school for at least one year prior to participation in the study; (4) Iraqi refugee mother who was comfortable sharing her experiences, responses, and opinions within an individual and group setting.

While the participants selected for this research were the first five participants who were willing and fit the selection criteria, the participants within this study were very diverse as they were representative of Iraqi refugee mothers who had children in elementary, middle, and high school; who followed different sects of Islam; and who were resettled to either the Western or Eastern U.S. The diversity of the participants provided a great opportunity to reveal differing experiences and perspectives of their role in their children’s education. In order to gain more information about the participants, table four provides a general demographic overview of the five participants, including the participants’ religion and sect, marital status, age and grade level of children, highest level of educational attainment, and employment status.
Table 4

*Participant Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Religion &amp; Sect</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Ages of Children</th>
<th>Current Grade Level of Children</th>
<th>Highest Education Level of Mother</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mariam</td>
<td>Muslim Shi’a</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12, 10, 5, 2</td>
<td>7th, 5th, K, N/A</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amel</td>
<td>Muslim Shi’a</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5, 3, 1</td>
<td>K, Pre-K, N/A</td>
<td>Trade School Certificate</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzid</td>
<td>Muslim Modern</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>22, 22, 19, 16</td>
<td>College, College, 11th</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Full-Time Outside Home (position not utilizing degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manal</td>
<td>Muslim Sunni</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>25, 21, 14</td>
<td>College, College, 9th</td>
<td>M.D.</td>
<td>Full-Time Outside Home (position not utilizing degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>Muslim Modern</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>20, 17, 12</td>
<td>College, 12th, 6th</td>
<td>B.A &amp; Certificate</td>
<td>Full-Time Outside Home (position not utilizing degree)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the study, the two participants who had only been living in the U.S. for three or four years had young children that attended school ranging in grades Pre-K to 7th. The three participants who had been living in the U.S. eight or nine years at the time the study was conducted all had children who were attending secondary school (6th to 12th grade) or college and had children who had attended school in Iraq, or their country of refuge, prior to attendance at public school in the U.S. Thus, the data collected references
perceptions of parent engagement at elementary, middle, and high school levels and from perspectives of mothers whose children either did or did not have prior education in another country other than the U.S.

All of the mothers in this study attended an institution of higher-education in Iraq after completing high school and completed either a certification, undergraduate, or graduate degree. The mothers in this study also differed in their present employment status. The three mothers that had been living in the U.S. at least eight years at the time of the study were employed full time outside of the home, whereas the two mothers who had only been living in the U.S. for four or fewer years remained home to care for their younger children. While Table 4 does not provide the details of the specific degrees attained by the mothers in an effort to protect their identity, it is important to note that all three of those participants were employed in positions that were in no way related to their degree.

While all of the participants in this study were practicing Muslims, the sect of Islam that they most closely ascribed to was different. One participant was Sunni, two were Shi’a, and two were Modern Muslims (Parray, 2011), which in part through the context of this research meant they did not veil. Furthermore, four of the five mothers were married and one mother had been widowed during the Iraqi war. All of the mothers had either three or four living children. One of the mothers had lost a child during their displacement, prior to moving to the U.S. While that child was not listed in Table 4, it is important to the participant that they are remembered and not overlooked within this study.
**Data Collection**

The use of multiple data collection methods was used to help give a more holistic understanding of the experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers so that authentic explanations could be constructed about the participants and their experiences (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Data collection within this inquiry was collected over 97 hours and four months from late September 2017 through January 2018. Data included 10 individual interviews, one focus group interview with Eastern U.S. participants, 80 hours of observations made in a variety of settings, and artifact collection. Table 5 summarizes the data sources within this study, the dates of data collection, and the amount of time I spent in hours collecting the data.
Table 5  

*Summary of Data Collection Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Data</th>
<th>Date of Collection</th>
<th>Time Spent (in hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam</td>
<td>10/02/17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amel</td>
<td>10/04/17</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzid</td>
<td>10/20/17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manal</td>
<td>10/21/17</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>10/23/17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>10/23/17</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants Included:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzid, Manal, Mimi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview #2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam</td>
<td>11/01/17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amel</td>
<td>11/29/17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzid</td>
<td>12/20/17</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manal</td>
<td>12/15/17</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>12/18/17</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Settings</td>
<td>09/27/17 to 10/19/17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Teacher Conferences</td>
<td>09/27/17 to 10/19/17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Residences</td>
<td>10/02/17 to 11/29/17</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places of Employment</td>
<td>10/20/17 to 10/23/17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts Included:</td>
<td>10/02/17 to 01/12/18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s school work, notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from school, articles, teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication, certificates,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade reports.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total number of hours spent during data collection** 97

The research process began with a minimum of five hours of observation of each participant prior to the first individual interviews in order to build rapport with each mother. The first individual interviews then occurred with each participant, some even occurring on the same day as the observations for the participants that lived in the Eastern U.S. due to the limited time I was physically present in their state. The observations
continued and then a focus group was scheduled with the participants. Following the focus group was a final individual interview with each participant that included a discussion about the artifacts that participants collected and shared that illustrated their perceptions of their role in their child’s education. These last individual interviews were conducted in person for the participants in the Western U.S. and using a traditional phone call for the participants in the Eastern U.S. as they preferred to speak over a telephone than through Skype. All participants gave me permission to photograph their artifacts, so photographs were taken of the artifacts in person with the participants in the West, and participants in the Eastern U.S. sent their artifacts digitally to me through email or text.

**Observations.** In order to “fill in the richness, nuance, and intricacy of the lived stories” of my participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 80), I conducted 80 hours of observations (15 hours minimum with each participant) that involved the intentional and personal immersion in the ongoing social activities of my participants (Wolcott, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined prolonged engagement as the “investment of sufficient time” to learn the culture of the participants, build trust, and test for distortions or misinformation about the data (p. 301). Observation adds to the salience or clarity of the research as it provides depth and purpose to the observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed the importance of investing enough time within observations so that the researcher feels a sense of saturation in the data and emergent findings. Observations occurred in various settings that I was invited to by each participant, most of them occurring within their private residence. Other observations
occurred within academic settings during parent informational meetings I was invited to, within parent-teacher conferences, and within the participants’ place of employment.

One primary purpose for utilizing participant observation as a method of data collection within this inquiry included the ability to build trust and rapport with the participants. Building rapport with each participant was essential to gathering authentic and quality data. Without established rapport and trust, the participants would have been hesitant to share detailed and honest experiences. Furthermore, observations helped to paint a fuller picture of the context surrounding the family which is crucial, as Nishimura, Nevgi, and Tella (2009) reminded us that high-context cultures typically communicate in ways that require the researcher to understand what isn’t said as much as what is, based upon the surrounding context of the communication.

Throughout observations, it was also imperative to engage in culturally appropriate reciprocity, exhibit a tolerance for ambiguity, and maintain balance (Wolcott, 2004). Wolcott (2004) defined reciprocity in fieldwork as the subtle exchange of intangibles such as hospitality or shared stories. Within the context of working with Iraqi mothers, reciprocity included honoring traditional norms of giving a small gift when accepting an invitation to a home or private event or accepting gestures of hospitality such as food and drink during observations and interviews. It also included conversational reciprocity where I was expected to share some personal stories to establish trust and relationship with participants. To obtain cultural insider status, I adhered to all cultural norms within interactions which included dressing modestly, coordinating interview locations that were private when conducted outside of the home.
environment, and providing food during any meetings outside of their home. Other
cultural norms that showed my respect for my participants and their cultural and religious
beliefs included meeting with the women only when their husbands were absent as well
as sharing and preparing meals together.

The intensive observations additionally allowed for a glimpse into parent
engagement practices that occurred at the home, such as the mother supporting her child
with native language development. Research shows that there is an interdependence
between a student’s native language development and success in acquiring a second
language (Ovando & Combs, 2012). Recognizing a mother’s engagement in supporting
her child’s education through a non-traditional lens may help educators re-conceptualize
notions of parent engagement practices of Iraqi refugee mothers.

The prolonged engagement in the field and extensive observations provided a
depth of data that could not be acquired within a more limited time in the field. Miles and
Huberman (1994) discussed that data gathered at the beginning of the study is weaker
than the data gathered at the end of a study as there has been greater time to build rapport
and trust with the participants. Greater trust and rapport ultimately led to greater validity
within the data as the participants felt more comfortable and were more articulate,
reflective in their dialogue, and willing to share more personal experiences later within
the data collection process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Field notes were captured
following observations and were expanded to capture as much of each experience as
possible. As the stories of the participants begin to take shape within the observations
(Stake, 1995), it was imperative to expand field notes, carefully and deliberately
attending to all interactions that could help convey understanding and meaning within the experiences of my participants (Yamasaki, Sharf, & Harter, 2014). During observations, Yamasaki, Sharf, and Harter (2014) discussed the importance of seeking coherency or sense making that may occur in all kinds of “commonplace activities – political debates, international diplomacy, cultural gatherings, religious rituals, social and commercial marketing, artistic renderings, family relationships,” and interactions pertaining to education or parent engagement (p. 101). In setting out to write the participants’ stories, the primary work during my observations was within the act of thinking, tuning in, discerning, and listening intentionally for meaning within the words, actions, and experiences of each participant (Clough, 2002; Yamasaki et al., 2014).

**Individual interviews.** A total of two individual interviews were conducted with each participant and utilized a dialogic approach which offered the opportunity to delve deeper into the experiences and feelings of each mother (Merriam, 1998). The first interviews occurred after at least five hours of observation and the last occurred near the end of the research period, following the focus group interview. An interpreter was utilized for the interviews conducted with the West participants, and all consents and interview questions asked were transcribed into Arabic (the primary language of Iraq) and were given to each participant prior to the interview session. No participant spoke another language outside of Arabic and English, so transcription into another language spoken in Iraq was not necessary. Each interview was audio recorded with permission from the participant and transcribed approximately one week following the interview by the researcher.
The interviews were guided by a list of general questions designed to elicit a conversational response, however, the exact wording and direction of the interview were dependent upon the responsive needs of each participant (Merriam, 1998). While general questions were developed, they were worded in a way that encouraged participants to “move away from general perceptions and impressionistic accounts to detailed descriptions of defining moments” (Yamasaki et al., 2014, p. 102). Anderson and Jack (1991) determined that interviews are extremely valuable in uncovering women’s perspectives and that women’s unique experiences are often muted or framed in a way that reflect men’s dominant position in culture. Anderson and Jack stated:

> Inadvertently, women often mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions. To hear women’s perspectives accurately, we have to learn to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them. (p. 11)

Within the interviews of Iraqi refugee mothers, it was important to be intentional in recognizing all subtleties of communication, especially giving consideration to high and low-context cultural communication cues by listening carefully during all interactions and paying attention to anything that revealed clues about their true experiences with parent engagement as a refugee mother.

As Janesick (2014) explained, interviewing is a creative act that encourages the discovery of meaning within a person’s life or experience. As a researcher or choreographer of conversation, Janesick discussed the importance of recognizing the impact of culture and assumptions to be aware of when conducting the interview. It was important to avoid assumptions of similarity or the assumption that the participants or I
share similarity of thoughts, beliefs, and values (Janesick, 2014). Recognition of the language difference was important to keep in mind so that misinterpretation of meaning between languages was minimized (Janesick). Ensuring the use of ordinary language throughout the interview and within reporting helped to make the participant’s story more accessible to a wide audience (Janesick).

Prior to the first interview, several different types of interview questions were crafted and designed to gain a deep understanding of the participant’s experiences and the meaning of experiences shared (Janesick, 2014). The interview opened with basic descriptive background questions that were designed to build the contextual frame of the case (Janesick), such as the following:

- Please start with telling me a little about your family and the journey you took that brought you to this area.
- How long have you lived here in (city) or in the United States?
- Where did you live before you moved here?
- What do you like about living here?
- I’d like you to think back to before you lived here in the United States. Tell me a memory you have of your own education or an experience you remember from when you went to school.
- What age were you when you started and completed school?
- What country were you living in when you attended school?
- What expectations did your parents have for you?
- What did your parents do to support your learning?
Tell me a little about your child’s experience attending school here. Did they attend another school prior to the school they are attending now?

How many years has your child been attending school and what grade are they in?

What do you think your child would say is their favorite thing about school?

What was your experience like when you first enrolled your child in school here in the United States?

What was helpful for you through this enrollment process?

Could you tell me about any barriers you have encountered as a parent within the educational system here in the U.S.?

What do you feel is your role in supporting your child’s education?

What do you feel is the teacher’s role or the administrator’s role?

What are your expectations for your child’s education?

Throughout the interview, questions were asked that were intended to gather more meaning. For example, clarifying questions were asked of participants that helped to gather more information about something they shared. These questions were worded similar to the following: You said you like your child’s teacher. Can you tell me more about what you like about her? Does she do something specific that you like? Is there something you wish she did, but does not do now? Experience or example questions (Janesick, 2014) were used to encourage the participants to expand on something they mentioned during the interview. These types of questions included: Can you tell me about the best conversation or meeting you had with your child’s teacher? You said you aren’t happy with that teacher. Can you tell me about one specific incident that happened or
give me an example of what the teacher could do better in supporting you and your child?

Comparison or contrast questions (Janesick, 2014) were also used to help clarify the participants meaning behind a statement they made. Comparison or contrast questions that were asked include: You said that education is so different here as compared to the education system in Iraq. Could you tell me about the education system in Iraq? What are some of the things you really like about education in Iraq? What are some of the things you really like about education here in the U.S.? What do you wish they would do differently here? Finally, the interviews were closed with questions that encouraged the participants to continue thinking about the information they already shared and potentially find further information to share (Janesick). The questions at the end of the interview were worded like the following: Is there anything I have forgotten to ask you that you feel is important? Is there anything else you wanted to share with me about your experience? Is there anything else you wish educators knew?

Questions during the second interview were created based upon individual participant responses within the first interview, observation conversations, and the focus group. For example, questions were asked that encouraged a participant to go into more detail about a specific event or asked the participant to clarify understanding about an emerging theme or piece of data. Due to the significant amount of time building relationships and rapport with each participant, the second interviews felt very informal.

**Focus group interviews.** After at least ten hours of observations and having completed the first individual interviews, a focus group interview was conducted that
allowed the participants to discuss their experiences openly within a homogenous group. Due to the demographics of the participants and the importance of conducting the focus group interviews in person, I had planned to conduct two separate focus group interviews; one with the Western U.S. participants, and one with the Eastern U.S. participants. The focus group for the Eastern U.S. participants was scheduled and all participants were able to attend, however the focus group for the participants in the West did not occur as one of the participants did not feel comfortable being interviewed with the other participant, despite having been given the interview questions and information well in advance. To ensure the two remaining participants had the opportunity to answer the questions asked of the others in the focus group interview, the participants were asked the focus group questions in addition to the second interview questions during their second individual interview.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that data obtained from a focus group is socially constructed through the interaction between participants which leads to the collection of data not accessible through individual interviews alone. Hennink (2014) explained that, within the unique context of a focus group research, the interactions of the group provide the opportunity for participants to not only share their views and hear the views of others but to potentially refine their own perspectives based upon what they have heard from the others in the group. The focus group started with introductions among participants, and while they were not informed in advance who the other participants were, the three participants had been previously acquainted and remembered each other from an interaction they had in the past. This reinforced the notion that the
Iraqi community is very close. It was important to allow adequate time for them to speak freely and build rapport with each other. Following introductions, the participants were provided with an overview of the study and what to expect during the group interview. The focus group was informally structured to be conducive to conversation, giving each participant space to discuss her experiences, perceptions, and thoughts within collective camaraderie and comfort. Participants were seated in a circle within a private meeting room at the hotel where I was staying. The environment was comfortable for the participants, and I had provided water and snacks for the participants. The focus group interview lasted approximately two and a half hours.

The focus group was structured with conversation starters through which attempted to capture perceptions and experiences with parent engagement. Some examples of conversation starters included:

- Think back over all the times you have participated in your child’s education; tell me about your most enjoyable memory.
- Suppose you could give educators one piece of advice about how to best support you and your child, what would you tell them?
- What is one thing you wish educators in your child’s school knew about you and your child(ren)?
- What are some things you do at home to support your child?
- What are some things that schools do, or should do, to strengthen the relationships between parents and teachers?
- What do you feel are some of the unique challenges Iraqi refugee families may
face within the educational system in the U.S.?

- In what ways do you think your culture may impact how you support your child with school?
- How could educators better meet your needs in a way that honors your culture?
- What is one thing you wish educators in your child’s school knew about you and your children?
- What else do you think is important for educators to know when supporting Iraqi refugee families?

The conversation starters were developed through careful consideration of the prior observations and individual interviews and were intended to encourage an even deeper level of reflection.

Throughout the focus group interview, I was actively listening for inconsistent comments, probing for understanding, and briefly summarizing key questions to seek confirmation that I was accurately understanding the participant’s responses (Krueger, 2002). To ensure that I accurately captured the mothers’ responses within the interview, I gave an oral summary at the conclusion of the focus group. This summary detailed what I captured and understood from their responses and provided the participants with an opportunity to confirm or clarify my understanding about the experiences and perceptions they shared. Immediately following the focus group, I wrote down important notes from the experience in my journal, noting the seating arrangement of the participants and noting pervasive responses or emotions within the conversations. Within approximately two days after the focus group interview, the recorded interview was transcribed and field
notes captured during the interview were expanded, connecting participant responses to any previous interactions and conversations that helped me to construct a more complete story of the participants’ experiences.

**Artifact collection.** In further developing the stories of Iraqi refugee women, artifacts provided valuable clues into the lives of my participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the beginning of the study, each participant was given a decorative photo box that served the purpose of a memory box (Clandinin & Connelly). They were asked to place at least ten things in their memory boxes that they felt were important and that may help me understand their experiences related to parent engagement. Some of the items, or artifacts, could have included photographs, trinkets, personal notes, correspondence between the mother and the school, school newsletters, or anything else that was significant to the participant and that would help me understand their perceptions of their role in their child’s education. The items could have been literal in explicitly showing the mother’s interaction or experience with the school and other items could have been metaphorical in their connection to the mothers’ perceptions. They were encouraged to include items that they felt represented their values, their role as a mother, and their role in their child’s education. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed, these small artifacts had potential to trigger the participant’s memories of important times, people, and events and can help them to retell their stories.

The participants that had children in elementary school primarily provided artifacts that included student work they had helped their child with. Some of the participants shared notes that were sent home by the teacher or school, and some parents
shared grades their child received in their classes and another shared an article that was important in describing her experience as a mother in the United States. One of the parents shared family photographs and another shared her children’s certificates of achievement and appreciation.

The second individual interview had originally been dedicated to discussing the items in the memory box. Each participant was asked to bring (Western participants) their memory box, or send me their artifacts digitally (Eastern U.S. participants) as they were to be the launching point for interview. However, prior to the second interview, many of the participants had elected to share their items with me early during observations. Two of the participants had added something new to their memory box and excitedly shared the newly added items with me each time we got together. As participants shared their items, they were encouraged to share the artifacts significance or relationship to their experience and perception of their role in their child’s education. With permission from the participants, I took pictures of or saved the digital artifact to use within my data analysis and research reporting. The original artifacts remained with the participants at all times throughout the study and were not collected or taken at any point in the data collection process. To protect the identity of all participants, any identifying information on the picture of an artifact was obscured through digitally overlaying blackout boxes within Microsoft Word or a similar graphic editing program. Participants were given their memory box to keep at the conclusion of the study.

After all of the artifacts were discussed, the participants were asked to answer a few more questions based upon previous interview responses, something said during the
artifact sharing, or something that emerged within the observations. Some of the questions included:

- What do you feel these artifacts mean for you in terms of parent engagement?
- How do you feel they explain your role in your child’s education?
- What is something you would have put in your memory box, but couldn’t?
- What is a memory that you would hope to include in your future?
- During our last interview, you mentioned that interaction with your child’s teacher is important. Can you tell me more about what exactly those interactions look like?
- What experiences have you had in your life that have helped you to better support your child?
- What are your hopes and dreams for your child’s future?

Following the interview, notes were written that captured important details from the interview, including emotion, non-verbal communications elicited during the interview, affect, tone, repeated phrases, use of metaphors or figurative language, and pauses. Capturing these elements were important within the structural analysis of the data as Iraqi mothers are typically high-context communicators, making it extremely important to pay close attention to how the participant is conveying her message, not simply what words she was using to answer each question.

In purposely including artifacts, this research offered a deeper glimpse into the experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers. As Riessman (2008) discussed, “visual representations of experience – in photographs, performance, art, and
other media – can enable others to see as a participant sees, and to feel… pictures do not simply restore a feeling but the capacity to feel” (p. 142). Pictures help to bring a previously private experience to shared comprehension (Riessman, 2008). The pictures of the artifacts that my participants choose to share from their memory box helped to recover a suppressed identity and history, describe their experiences, or tell a new story (Riessman, 2008). The artifacts, when looked at in relation to the interviews and observations, helped to bring into view a collective understanding of the conditions, experiences, histories, and perspectives of the participants (Riessman, 2008). The artifacts also helped to demonstrate what each mother valued and what she perceived as most important within her role as a mother supporting her child’s education.

**Ethical Considerations**

Maintaining the ethical integrity of this research was a significant priority, and no data were collected until appropriate Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was granted. Working with a marginalized and vulnerable population made the ethical considerations of confidentiality and safety extremely important. I made every attempt to maximize the confidentiality of my participants throughout this research. Participant’s names, addresses, children’s names, or any other links to their identity or their family’s identity are not used in the reported findings or will be used in future publications and presentations related to this study. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym that was used in the reporting of the research findings. All interview and focus group responses were audio recorded with the permission of each participant and all data that was collected, including the audio recordings, were kept on my password protected
computer or in a locked filing cabinet in my office until the completion of the study, at which time all data were transferred to a flash drive, deleted from the computer, and put into a locked filing cabinet in my research advisor’s office.

As participants within this study have endured trauma in their past, it was important to recognize the importance of creating safety for the participants within this study. In order to elevate the element of safety for my participants, the consent form and interview questions were transcribed into the participants’ native language(s) so that they accurately understood the nature of the study and the questions that were going to be asked of them. Participants were also made aware that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could cease participation at any point within the study. Additionally, it was crucial that, within my questioning during interviews and focus groups, the participants understood that they had the ability to pass on answering any question in which they did not feel comfortable discussing. The questions were carefully written so as to eliminate possible discomfort within discussions, and highly politicized and stereotypical representations of Iraqi refugees or conversations that could have induced thoughts about the trauma they endured as a refugee were avoided (i.e. wars in Iraq, situations leading to refugee status, etc). This study was conducted in a way that respected the culture and protected the dignity of each of the participants. Creating a safe environment throughout the research process validated and affirmed my respect for the participants’ culture, wisdom, experiences, and expertise as partners in this research process.
Data Analysis

“Narrative analysis ought not claim a final word, but instead, stimulate ongoing sense making” (Yamasaki et al., 2014, p. 115). Data analysis within this narrative case study began as soon as the first data were collected. Observational field notes, detailed and expanded field notes, reflective research journal entries, individual interview transcriptions, focus groups discussion transcripts, and pictures taken of the participant’s artifacts (e.g. items in the memory box, family photographs, flyers, and distributions from the school) were reviewed. Within an iterative data analysis process, the data analysis was consistent and recurring throughout the research process allowing for reflexivity in the development of meaning within the narratives. Within a narrative framework, the data were first initially analyzed for elements of story such as plot, characters, setting and context, time or chronology, motives, and life lessons (Yamasaki et al., 2014). The storied experiences of the participants emerged through the observations and interviews and were looked at more closely through thematic and structural analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Within thematic analysis, Riessman (2008) stated that data will be “interpreted in light of thematics developed by the investigator (influenced by prior and emergent theory, the concrete purpose of an investigation, the data themselves, political commitments, and other factors)” (p. 54). Thematic analysis thus gave considerable attention to the larger context of my participants lives, and helped me to make connections between the experiences depicted in personal narratives and the larger social structures within public education (i.e. power relations, hidden inequalities, historical
contingencies) (Riessman, 2008). As Riessman explained, “narrative scholars keep a story ‘intact’ by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases” (p. 53). Within the broadest form of thematic narrative analysis, meta-narratives, the data were looked at with regard to broad themes surrounding the ideologies, assumptions, and values of the participants and their experiences (Yamasaki et al., 2014).

The next level of thematic analysis, mid-level analysis, primarily focused on one or more element of a story or on the biographical or life-history of each participant. It helped to reveal particularly meaningful events or experiences within a larger context (Yamasaki et al., 2014). The storied experiences of the participants emerged through the observations and interviews and were looked at closely through a thematic lens. In order to conduct thematic analysis, the data collected from the interviews and observational notes were open coded and then axial coded. Once axial coding was complete, the data were collapsed and combined in order to identify significant themes related to the research questions. The themes that emerged within this analysis were then be compared and combined with the results from the structural analysis.

**Structural Analysis**

Given the nature of the research problem and the participants within the study, conducting a structural analysis of the data helped to reveal cultural and linguistic meaning embedded within the stories of the participants. Structural analysis, according to Riessman (2008), allowed “topics and voices to be included in qualitative research that might be missing otherwise” (p. 80). Akin to unpacking the detailed nuances of culture,
structural analysis required a step back from the narratives of the participants to notice how the participants used language and storytelling to convey their experiences (Riessman, 2008). As Riessman discussed, attention to story structure can yield different findings than thematic analysis as it looks at how the participants tell their stories, not simply what their story is. Focus not only on what the story is, but how it is told helped to reveal “important differences in meaning of the ‘same’ event for different participants” (Riessman, 2008, p. 90).

Given that the research was conducted with a high-context culture, which is a culture that heavily relies on the surrounding context to convey and interpret meaning from the words being exchanged (Qingxue, 2003), it was important to structurally analyze the data for hidden meanings within the spoken words of the participants. As a researcher whose background is founded upon a low-context communication style, without taking into consideration the structural aspect of the data, I may have only noticed the direct and explicit verbal messages shared by my participants despite the cultural context surrounding the information (Qingxue, 2003). Riessman’s (2008) analogy, comparing structural analysis to that of classical music, beautifully illustrated the need for structural analysis when working within convergent cultural communication styles:

To hear how a composition is structured and what each part contributes, musicians break the score down, sees what each instrument or musical phrase adds, that is, its function in the overall composition. When we go to a concert, unless we are musicians, we typically just experience the work; the performers, on the other hand, have done considerable “unpacking” in rehearsal to construct the unity we hear. Structural analysis of oral narratives requires the same level of scrutiny; we slow down a narrative account (so to speak)—step back from it—to notice how a narrator uses form and language to achieve particular effects. (p. 81)
In order to look more closely at the data through structural analysis, smaller excerpts from interview transcripts were expanded into stanzas that looked similar to that of a poem. The excerpts were chosen based upon their direct connection to the research questions and the frequency that a similar topic, concept, or story was mentioned throughout the narratives of the participants. The stanzas were then coded by noting the participants affect or emotion, the use of metaphors or figurative language, and the use of pauses or repeated phrasing. This coding technique used a non-linear approach and brought to light the narrator’s emotions refracted through structure and word choice (Riessman, 2008). The codes were then compared and connected to the themes that were emerging through the thematic analysis in order to paint an accurate and detailed picture of the characters’ stories.

Structural analysis provided insight about how participants used speech to construct themselves and their histories while thematic analysis assumed that the accounts given by each of the participants resemble each other because the accounts are categorized and organized around the same theme (Riessman, 2008). By combining structural and thematic analysis of the storied experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers, I was able to describe broad patterns within the data while still acknowledging the variation in meaning for different individuals (Riessman). Simply ignoring the structural analysis within the context of this study could have caused me to miss the important differences in the meaning of similar events for different participants (Riessman).
Data Analysis Discussion and Emergent Themes

The narratives of each mother in this study were gathered using a variety of methods and were analyzed using both thematic and structural analysis to identify themes, or stories, that would help educators to understand how Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their child’s education. As a narrative inquirer, when navigating through the analysis process, it became very apparent that my role as the researcher was very complex as the process of making sense of the narratives and storylines of each mother felt very messy. Trahar (2009) explained that narrative research involving such intensive levels of intercultural interaction and human relationship is going to feel messy, and that often the data needs to be valued in its complexity and difference instead of forced into neat and organized frameworks of experience. Narrative analysis allowed me to explore the mothers’ narratives and reflexively examine my own voice, position, and interpretation within the narratives so that I could begin shape their collective voice and present their perceptions in a way that would resonate with educators and researchers alike. The themes that emerged through the analysis process helped to illustrate the profound differences within the mothers’ experiences and the importance of understanding the cultural perspectives embedded within each mother’s understanding and perceptions of parent engagement.

Intensive analysis of the data revealed three primary themes: (1) Identity, (2) Efficacy, and (3) Advocacy. Through these three themes, educators are given a rare glimpse into the narratives of Iraqi refugee mothers that have the potential to lead to a deeper understanding of their experiences and perceptions of parent engagement within
the U.S. The first theme, identity, is reflected at the intersection of ethnic, gendered, educational, and religious identities. The theme of efficacy is explored in relation to self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Finally, the third theme explored advocacy through the lens of Iraqi mothers as advocates and educators as advocates.

Figure 5 was created to help present the themes, subthemes, and significant codes that supported each primary theme. As can be seen in figure 5, identity, efficacy, advocacy are the three primary themes. The Subthemes are then listed under each primary theme. The significant codes that emerged within analysis are then listed alphabetically under the primary themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTITY</th>
<th>Ethnic</th>
<th>Gendered</th>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Religious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFICACY</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
<th>Collective Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVOCACY</th>
<th>Iraqi Mothers as Advocates</th>
<th>Educators as Advocates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics, Achievement, College, Communication, Cooperation, Courage, Dedication, Defend, Dependence, Dreams, Educators, Future, Happiness, Hope, Inspiration, Judgement, Opportunity, Rapport, Resources, Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. *Three Primary Themes with Embedded Subthemes.*
Trustworthiness, Rigor, and Researcher Reflexivity

Trustworthiness, as a qualitative or interpretive researcher (Erickson, 1986), is central to establishing the validity and reliability of the proposed research process and the findings that will result. Lincoln and Guba (1985) coined the term trustworthiness to examine criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research. Within natural and human sciences (Erickson, 1986), trustworthiness is a complex matter that encompasses criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Anney, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Schwandt, 2007; Stake, 1995). Table 6, titled *Criteria of Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research*, details the four primary criteria in establishing trustworthiness and the corresponding definition and strategies associated with each criterion. Effectively embracing these criteria of trustworthiness within the research of Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement demonstrated my commitment to conducting rigorous and ethical research and brought greater trustworthiness to the research findings.
Table 6

Criteria of Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria Establishing Trustworthiness</th>
<th>Definition of Criteria</th>
<th>Strategy of Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility (Internal Validity)</td>
<td>Confidence in the truth of the research findings.</td>
<td>Prolonged Engagement Observation Data Triangulation Theory Triangulation Member Checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability (Reliability)</td>
<td>The consistency of the findings over time and the results matching the data collected.</td>
<td>Peer Examination Audit Trail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability (External Validity)</td>
<td>Extent to which the results can be transferred or applied to other contexts.</td>
<td>Purposeful Sampling Resonance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability (Objectivity)</td>
<td>The degree to which results can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers.</td>
<td>Researcher Reflexivity Confirmability Audit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Anney, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Schwandt, 2007; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989)

**Credibility**

Credibility, also referred to as internal validity, centers around the truth of the research findings and their congruence with reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1995). In other words, credibility establishes that the researcher is accurately interpreting, representing, and reconstructing the participants’ views (Anney, 2014; Schwandt, 2007). Within a focus on credibility within my research, I used prolonged engagement and persistent observation by immersing myself in the participants’ world as much as possible (Anney, 2014). Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed that data gathered at the beginning of the study is weaker than the data gathered at the end of the study. This suggests that
the intensive time observing at the participants homes, places of employment, and within academic settings helped me to establish trust with the participants and helped me gain a greater understanding for their culture, context, and worldview.

Additionally, to establish credibility, this study used data triangulation through the use of multiple sources of data and through multiple levels of analysis. In collecting data through two separate interviews, during a focus group interview, within observations, and in the collection of artifacts relevant each family and the study, I was able to determine if the emergent findings are consistent among participants and between contextual circumstances (Stake, 1995).

Theory triangulation was another strategy I used within this study to establish credibility. According to Guion (2002), theory triangulation brings together two theories that have differing perspectives and uses those perspectives to approach research and interpret data. Within the context of this study, I brought together the perspectives of critical race theory and feminist theory. Using a critical race theorist lens helped me to look explicitly at the data in a way that privileged the voices of my participants, Iraqi refugee mothers. The feminist lens helped me to understand and frame the data in a way that acknowledged each mother's gendered experience. Theoretical triangulation honors Crenshaw’s (1991) notion of intersectionality and allowed me to establish credibility within my research by acknowledging that the factors of race, gender, and culture all intersect and shape the experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers and their perceptions of parent engagement in the U.S.
Finally, using two different types of analysis provided an additional means of validating the trustworthiness of this research as the data were looked at through two different lenses in order to confirm emergent themes, verify the accuracy of the data, and discover alternate explanations (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, member checking by providing an oral summary at the conclusion of the focus group interview allowed me to confirm or clarify my understanding of the experiences and perceptions my participants shared.

**Dependability**

The dependability of my research was primarily concerned with the reliability and consistency of the findings over time and the results of the research matching the data collected (Anney, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1995). To establish dependability within my research, it was important to create an audit trail so that I could account for all the research decisions I made throughout the research process (Anney, 2014). This included maintaining documents that showed my raw data, observational notes, expanded field notes, and interview transcripts. Use of peer examination, through inviting one educational research colleague who is neutral to my research, provided objective feedback about the research process and data analysis (Anney, 2014). This feedback contributed to deeper reflexivity and enhanced my ability to identify connections within my data that may have been overlooked.

**Transferability**

External validity is termed transferability in qualitative research and looks at the extent to which the results can be transferred, applied, or generalized to other contexts
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1995; Schwandt, 2007). Transferability was enhanced within this research through purposeful sampling and use of rich thick description throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (1995) described purposeful sampling as a technique used to select participants based upon specific criteria associated with the research questions of the study. Patton (2015) argued that purposeful sampling helps to brings an in-depth understanding to a specific case which is of central importance in qualitative research. While this study in no way attempted to explicitly generalize the experiences of all Iraqi refugee mothers in the U.S. educational system, it did acknowledge that educators may have the ability to transfer the findings from a small group of Iraqi refugee mothers to larger concepts surrounding effective partnerships with minority families. As Merriam (1995) stated, by “attending to the particular, universals can be discovered” (p. 5). In other words, what is learned from the particular situations surrounding the experiences of parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers can be applied to similar situations encountered by other educators.

Using thick description within the data collection and reporting also supported the notion of transferability. By using thick description within the narratives, “transferability is achieved when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own actions” (Anney, 2014, p. 845). The idea of resonance emerges within discussions of transferability and the use of thick description. Resonance, which is especially important in narrative research, is used to refer to a researchers ability to meaningfully affect an audience and can be defined as the degree to which the research influences, impacts, or moves readers or audiences
Through aesthetic merit and writing that uses thick description, resonance occurs, allowing for the comparison of the context surrounding Iraqi refugee mothers to other possible contexts (Anney, 2014). Reiterating again the notion of counterstories, by placing the voice Iraqi refugee mothers at the center of the narratives, and in using thick description to capture her experiences in education, educators may be able to make connections between the narratives of each mother and the larger social structures in education that serve to support or dismantle successful partnerships with parents.

**Confirmability**

Within qualitative research, confirmability is concerned with the degree to which results can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers and is founded on the premise that a researcher is never objective (Morrow, 2005; Schwandt, 2007). In promoting confirmability of my research findings, it was important to be reflexive throughout the entire research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Morrow (2005) defined researcher reflexivity as providing an “opportunity for the researcher to understand how her or his own experiences and understanding of the world affect the research process” (p. 253). Throughout the research, I engaged in reflexive journaling (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989) and reflexive practice where I continually reflected on and assessed the influence of my own background, interests, and perceptions in the research process (Anney, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed the importance of examining one’s own biases, assumptions, dispositions, worldviews, experiences, and theoretical orientations as this “clarification allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might
have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (p 249). Throughout the research process it was important to recognize my privilege and continually work to intentionally pursue the research from a multicultural and counter-hegemonic lens.

**Summary**

This chapter began with a discussion about the qualitative design for this research that sought to answer the primary research question: How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive parent engagement and their role in their children’s education in the United States? Following this was an overview of constructionism, the epistemological stance taken within the study, and an examination of critical race feminism, the theoretical framework. The methodological design of this research was narrative case study and included methods of participant observation, individual interviews, a focus group interview, and artifact collection. The participants, including five Iraqi refugee mothers of school aged children were purposefully selected and were representative of different grade levels of children and geographical locations to provide for the greatest yield in rich data collection. Data analysis included thematic and structural analysis techniques in an effort provide a thorough analysis of all the data which lead to an accurate reporting of the findings.

In promoting academic achievement for all students, it is a moral imperative for educators to understand, build successful partnerships with, and give voice to those who may not be able to speak for themselves. The voices of Iraqi refugee mothers are missing in the literature surrounding parent engagement in education. In constructing the experiences of parent engagement for Iraqi refugee mothers, educators have the privilege
of getting a rare glimpse into the lives of this community we serve. Revealing the experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers and telling their stories may provide a way for truths, which cannot be otherwise told, to be uncovered (Clough, 2002). “If we think of the writing of stories in educational research as the creation of a building, the writer becomes the architect” (Clough, 2002, p. 8). It is my hope that this research builds a foundation of understanding, empathy, and respect for Iraqi refugee families, leverage authentic partnerships with parents, and stimulate conversations around educational equity that will promote the success of every child in our nation.
Chapter four is organized as a journey through three narratives that illustrate primary themes revealed within the data analysis: (1) Identity, (2) Efficacy, and (3) Advocacy. The data presented through the lens of each theme will help to answer the primary research question: How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their children's education in the United States? Furthermore, the stories of each mother bring greater clarity to the following sub-questions raised within this study: How does culture influence Iraqi refugee mothers' experiences of parent engagement? What is the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers?

While the stories of each Iraqi refugee mother were unique, there were common threads throughout each of their narratives. These threads have been woven into the narratives presented in this chapter which represent the collective voice of six women, those of the five Iraqi mothers that participated in this study and my own. Riessman (2008) said, “the researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in their creation” (emphasis in original, p. 21). The stories are presented through three scenes that unfold on the stage of a mother’s experience during a parent-teacher conference. Parent
teacher conferences, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003), represent the borderland between parents and educators, and often reveal the sharp dissonance of values between a home and a school. By illuminating the experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers’ perceptions of parent engagement from this context within the larger narratives, the data reveal the complex relationships and the broader cultural narrative at play.

The first scene explores the theme of identity. Identity, as central and foundational to understanding the other two themes is examined at the intersection of ethnicity, education, gender, and religion. The second scene brings light to theme of efficacy and connects self-efficacy and collective efficacy to each mother’s perception of her role in her child’s education. The third scene explores the notion of advocacy, providing readers with greater understanding about the cultural influences on perceptions of parent engagement of Iraqi mothers and the role of advocacy in the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers. Figure 6 shows how the three primary themes are all connected, with identity being the central gear that impacts experiences surrounding efficacy and advocacy.
In order to protect the identity of the participants and increase confidentiality in this study, some details within narratives were changed and no pseudonyms were connected to individual quotes as some of the stories shared may make a participant identifiable when connected to the demographics of the participants in this study. While some details were changed, all efforts were made to retain the meaning behind the stories each mother shared. Following each scene, I have included my interpretive commentary highlighting the salient points with extensive quotes from the participants to help connect readers from each narrative and theme to the research questions guiding this study. Shope (2006) said, “when you are preparing for a journey, you own the journey. Once you’ve started the journey, the journey owns you” (p. 165). My hope is that through this journey
readers will connect with the greater story of Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences with parent-engagement within the U.S., and begin to recognize opportunities to bridge the borders and boundaries that inhibit authentic partnerships between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers.

**Scene One: Identity**

“Please, I ask you. Remember where I am from. Remember who I was. Remember what I lost. Then you may start to understand who I AM.” (Participant)

As I walk down the long hall of my son’s school towards his teacher’s classroom, I see the curious glances of the teachers, students, and parents. Many people saunter by giving me a seemingly nervous smile and a nod. Some walk past keeping their eyes to the floor, then turn for a curious glance when they think I am not looking. I keep my head high and pretend I don’t notice their glances. On the outside, you see a woman wearing a hijab with three children in tow. On the inside is a woman that longs to be understood.

Walking through the classroom door I see the white-haired teacher sitting at the moon shaped table looking at me kindly. Staying in her seat she raises her arm and gestures for me to sit in the chair, nervously nodding in greeting, and looking expectantly behind me for the interpreter who attends all of our meetings. I sit quickly leaning forward on the chair and tell my children to go and play in the back of the room. After a few moments of awkward silence the teacher shifts in her chair, shuffles her papers, and then begins to slowly and calculatingly say, “Thank... you... for... coming. Do you... know... where Nora is... the... interpreter...? ” I shake my head no. She gives me a quick smile in reply and looks back down at her papers, pulling out a thick folder with my son’s name on it.
Waiting in this moment, not feeling confident with the words I need to communicate, I begin to think. What does this teacher think of me? What does she think of my son? Does she like me? Does she like him? Does she know my family? Does she know who I am? Does she know where we have been? What we have been through?

No. This teacher only knows our name and sees that we have come from a country called Iraq. She knows that our native language is Arabic and that we are followers of Islam. She knows how many children I have (now) and where we live. She knows everything that can be written on a school enrollment form. But there is more. So much more.

I am worried for my son. I am worried for this meeting. Does the teacher like him? Will she have good things to say about him? Has he caused any trouble? Is he learning as fast as his peers? Does he have any friends? Does she know that he still has nightmares at night?

I wish she knew. I wish she understood not just where we came from, but what we came from. I wish she understood not just how we got here, but why we had to come. What would I tell her? Where would I start? Well, the most logical place is at the beginning. The beginning of the end.

Who I Was

It all started on a day like any other. Rummaging through the kitchen I quickly made dinner for my four hungry children and my husband who had returned from a long day of work at the hospital where he served as a physician in community medicine. I was ready for a quiet evening as I had also worked a long day lecturing at the University. My
11-year-old daughter was helping me by holding my 6-month-old son, and my other two sons, aged 7 and 14 were completing their homework on the floor of the living room. Our home was peaceful. Our home was happy. Our home was complete. At least it was until I heard the door crash to the floor and turned to see men with assault rifles pointing guns at my head. At that moment, everything changed.

Guns. Screaming. Blackness. That is all I could remember as I woke up ten days later in the hospital. I woke up calling for my husband, calling for my children. I woke up alone. When the doctor returned I was told how lucky I was to be alive. I had been shot in the head, but the wound would heal. While that wound would mend in time, the hole in my heart finding out my husband had died would never fully disappear.

My children. My children. They had been spared. They were all I had left. They had watched as assassins murdered their father in front of their eyes, and had tried to murder their mother. Never knowing who had attacked us, or why, left another void that would never be filled.

All I knew was that I had had everything. I had a home, a husband, a family. I had a respected job and I had a future. I had friends, a community, safety, and happiness. All I knew was, after the U.S. army invaded Iraq in April of 2003, I lost everything. Minutes turned into hours. Hours turned into days. Days turned into years. My children and I stayed in our home in Baghdad for as long as we could. Without my husband, we were left vulnerable. The war ravaged our home. The violence was unpredictable and devastating. It was literally hell outside of my front door. We would have to step over bodies to cross the street.
It had been two years since the attack at our home. I thought that life couldn’t get any worse. That was until the day that my first-born son died unexpectedly from what they thought was a heart attack. He was only 16. They told me the psychological stress was too much for him to handle. I knew then that this was no life for my children and had to get away from here. Our home was gone. Our country was crumbling down around us. Our future here had been stolen from us. I was all my children had left. My children were all I had left. I had to protect them. We said goodbye to our country, our home, and our life as we began our journey towards Syria.

The border between Iraq and Syria was challenging to cross. The police and border patrol would frequently stop people from crossing to interrogate them if they suspected someone could be a terrorist. We were the ones who had been terrorized yet they thought we were the terrorists. If you had a last name that was Shi’a, and they were Sunni, you would be scrutinized. It was better to keep your true identity hidden. We were tired. We were scared. All we wanted to find was a place where we could again find peace.

The first few months in Syria were very challenging for our family. People assumed that because we were still in an Arabic speaking country, that everything was the same in Syria as it was in Iraq. That could not be farther from the truth. The dialect is different, the culture is different, and the education system is different. To try and reestablish our lives I searched to find schools for my children to attend and to help the children adjust to life in a new country. While we were no longer fearing for our lives like we did in Iraq, we still had to fight daily to survive. I was unable to work in Syria as I
had no legal papers to be there. The money that I brought with us ran out quickly and the small jobs I could find barely kept food in my children’s stomach.

After struggling to survive in Syria for nearly three years, one afternoon I received a phone call from a man who asked if we had applied for refugee status with the UN. At first, I thought he was joking but quickly realized he was serious. He helped me to fill out all of the documents and then the waiting began. My family went through five or six very long interviews. After six more months, we received the notice that we were approved and were being sent to America. We had no choice where we went. All we knew was that we were going somewhere safer than Iraq, or at least that is what we had hoped.

Who I Am

America. This is now my home. Our first few months in America were very scary. I was scared to leave the house. Everything looked different. Everything sounded different. A new language. A new culture. Another new world to adapt to. The sponsor assigned to our family helped us to enroll the children in the neighborhood schools, and just like that, we were now a part of the fabric of American life.

The first six months the children were in school they cried every single day. The teachers started having to call to have me talk to them or come and pick them up. My children told me how scared they were and how they couldn’t understand anything around them. The schools are so different from the schools in Iraq. I used to be able to support my children with anything they needed with school, but when we first came to America I didn’t even know how to navigate the system or who to talk to in order to learn how everything worked.
While our sponsors took care of the payments for our accommodations for the first three months, I quickly realized that in order to continue to make it here I needed to get a job. I no longer had time to adjust and attend English language classes. I had to find a way to bring in money to support my children. It did not take me long to realize that the college degrees I had received from Iraq wouldn’t be honored for employment in a professional position. Despite having come from one of the most prestigious positions at my University, I now had to accept a position that barely paid minimum wage.

America. This is now my home. But who am I now that I am here? I am now a proud American, but in my heart, I will forever be Iraqi. I now report to work at a clothing store, but I will forever remember the respect and honor I once had when I walked into my University as a distinguished professor. I now sit quiet and uncertain at my son’s conference, but will never forget the authority and confidence I once had to help steer his path in education. I have been given a second chance at life but I had to exchange my identity, my dignity, and my prestige, for safety, for hope, and for my children’s future.

Interpretive Commentary Scene
One: Reflections on Identity

This scene illustrated the deep desire of Iraqi refugee women to be known and understood in relation to their identity as Iraqi refugee mothers. For some of the mothers, this research provided an outlet in which they could finally find their voice. For each Iraqi refugee mother, identity was central to how she mediated and experienced the sociocultural contexts that surrounded her, including the context of mainstream education in the United States.
As a significant and primary theme within the data, identity for Iraqi refugee mothers was the lens through which they perceived their role in their child’s education. Supporting the literature surrounding intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) and the notion that women have layered identities (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010), the perceptions and experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers were best understood within the multidimensionality of each mother’s identity, which in this study specifically occurred at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, education, and religion. For Iraqi refugee mothers, the notions of identity became prominent within the stories and narratives they shared.

Imploring educators to seek understanding about Iraqi refugee mothers and families in the U.S., one participant said:

> It’s frustrating and sad. They [educators and general American public] don’t know the history. They don’t know the story. They don’t know how much Iraqi people struggled. How much they are suffering, till now. As educators, at least you have to care. At least try to understand what happened. Ask, why are those people here? They have to understand the culture and the language that the refugee children come from. If a school does not care about the family, and who they are, then they can’t care about the children.

As this quote suggested, many of the mothers expressed that they felt educators would be unable to build meaningful partnerships with them without first understanding who they were, bringing the importance of identity to the surface. According to Malkki (1992), refugees often feel as if they are in continual conflict with notions of identity as they attempt to rebuild themselves in the new social and geopolitical contexts that they are forced into.
The following section explores intersectionality through the Iraqi refugee mothers’ ethnic, educational, gendered, and religious identities, which will lay the foundation of understanding and connection of the other two themes to the research questions. While the following section has attempted to isolate the divergent experiences between ethnic, gendered, educational, and religious identity, the experiences reflected within the quotes from each mother demonstrate the complex intersectionality of each Iraqi mother’s identity and overlap throughout the individual sections.

**Ethnic Identity**

Foundational to the narratives each Iraqi mother shared was the notion of ethnic identity or the interrelationship between her cultural, national, linguistic, and social identities. Each mother’s ethnic identity as an Iraqi American woman was the lens through which she viewed the world, mediated relationships, and navigated the cultural borders within the education system in the U.S. While the stories leading up to each mother’s arrival in the U.S. were traumatic, each mother revealed a deep pride for her native country as she shared stories of her life in Iraq before the war. Ethnic identity was revealed through these comparative stories about the differences between the sociopolitical and educational contexts of the U.S. and Iraq. One mother described her country prior to the invasion of 2003.

*Iraq, before 2003, was a good country. It was safe, clean, and full of highly educated people. People lived peacefully. Education was free, even if you wanted to study and get your Ph.D. I am sure you [the researcher] are paying a lot for your degree, but back home, my government would pay for our education. All of our health care was paid for by the government. If you are working and you become pregnant, they give you one month paid sick leave before your labor, and six months post-labor, paid. You are also granted one year to stay with the baby to raise him, with the six months fully paid for, and the last six months you...*
are paid half of your normal salary. No other country can do that. Believe me. My country was amazing.

One mother proudly added, “In Iraq, women were in government. Women were driving. Women actually had rights there before they did here in the U.S.” While the women revered Iraq for being so progressive with women’s rights and were very proud of their ethnic identity as Iraqi women, the mothers also shared how they were able to adapt into their identity as American women.

I like it here [the U.S.]. It was easier for my family maybe. From the beginning, we knew the rules [sociocultural norms of U.S. culture]. You have to know the rules here and so you know how to live a good life. We know the rules and try to follow the rules so that our life is good here. Not all women are like me, but I think that it is easy to understand [how to live here] if you are open-minded.

As this quote illustrates, having a prior understanding of the cultural norms of mainstream American culture was helpful for some of the Iraqi mothers who were resettled to the U.S. This notion of navigating norms and the impact it has on the experiences of Iraqi refugee women is extremely prevalent in the context of education.

Educational Identity

Tied to each mother’s ethnic identity is the notion of educational identity or her beliefs, values, and experiences surrounding education. Foremost with relation to education, all of the mothers shared illustrations of the differences in the education system between Iraq and the U.S. One mother helped to paint a picture of the education system in Iraq as compared to the education system in the U.S. as follows:

Everything here is different. In Iraq, we are surrounded by all different languages. We grow up knowing Arabic and learning English from a young age. Our schools teach Islam and the Qur’an. We study six or seven different subjects, and each subject has its own book. So, we have a book for every subject. There is also a schedule that is followed for the students. So, all the parents know what the
children are learning because they follow the schedule and use the same book. Parents are expected to help their children at home, but this is easy because we know exactly what they are learning. In Iraq, I know very well how to help my kids with their homework. But here, parents don’t have this type of thing. Here they allow children to just choose their own books from the library or give them all different books.

While this participant explained how challenging it was to understand how to help her child with school as compared with her previous experiences in Iraq, she did add that she could see the value in the educational approaches in the U.S. She added that, “Maybe this is much better than we have in Iraq, as maybe it helps the kids to be open-minded. Not like Iraq, where we have them think in one box and one book.” These quotes illustrate the complex differences in education, requiring Iraqi mothers to negotiate their values and roles in supporting their children now that they live in the U.S.

The language and the curriculum were not the only differences in education the mothers described. Another mother gave an overview of the educational system in Iraq as compared to their perception of the system in the U.S. as she described her experiences growing up in Iraq.

I was six years old when I started elementary school [in Iraq]. I stayed in classes until I was 21 or 22. The government gives us all of the supplies for free. New books, new rulers, pencils, everything, it was all new. Iraq used to be one of the best education systems in the world. I was very clever, and my family expected me to be a doctor. At the end of 6th grade, 9th grade, and 12th grade, you have to take placement tests. Your grade on the 12th grade placement test affects your career. If you get a high score, you can go to medical school or engineering school. If you get lower or average scores, you go to a general college. Because the government pays for the school, you take the test, and it determines your future job. This is different than here [the U.S.] where you can study anything. You can jump from major to major. Here, you cannot fail.

For Iraqi mothers, not only is there a collective pride around their national education system, but this quote reveals a shift in the cultural values of the education systems
between Iraq and the U.S. The mothers have to negotiate these values, recognizing that while their choices for their educational future were constrained by their results on a placement test, their children now have the opportunity to pursue any path they would like.

In addition to the differences in the pedagogical structure and academic expectations for students, many of the mothers in this study shared the cultural nuances that impacted their children’s experiences within education in the U.S. One mother shared how she felt that teachers in the U.S. provided children with multiple opportunities to learn and demonstrate their understanding. She gave the following example:

*Here [in U.S. schools], they [teachers] repeat, repeat, and repeat the concepts. They tell my children to ask for help and ask questions if they don’t understand. In Iraq, it is not the same. They will say something one time, and you better understand. In Iraq, if you raise your hand and ask a question, the teacher will ask you why you weren’t paying attention! You shouldn’t have questions. I like this about here.*

The notion of high and low context communication styles is important here as this quote shows the conflict between Iraqi family perceptions of classroom interaction expectations and the expectations of educators in mainstream classrooms in the U.S. In primarily valuing high-context communication styles (Qingxue, 2003), Iraqi mothers may not understand the value of her child raising their hand and advocating for themselves when they don’t understand a question, a strategy educators often encourage students to use to when they don’t understand or to increase participation. Conversely, educators may not understand the logic behind and Iraqi student’s silence within the classroom. Iraqi
mothers have to mediate their own values between their educational experiences in Iraq with the pedagogical philosophies and values of education in the U.S.

Sharing the positive sentiments about the education system in the U.S., another mother shares the following:

*In my opinion, the education system here is very good. The school is very different between here and Iraq, and that is good. We start learning another language from the time we are in preschool until college. It is very challenging. Here, no. Here it is very easy. Everything is very easy here. The teacher is easy and nice with the kids. In Iraq, no, they are tough and hard on the kids. Yes, it is very different here. It is good.*

This Iraqi mother’s shared not only positive sentiment regarding the educational system in the U.S. but also showed her perceptions around the notion of educational rigor and the perceived complexities between the curriculum and instruction between the U.S. and Iraq. Similar to research suggesting parents may not have an understanding about instructional objectives (Epstein, 2009; Flynn, 2007), Iraqi parents may not always understand the curricular objectives based upon their own cultural or educational backgrounds, or have feelings of self-efficacy to support their children (as noted later in the findings), but their background experience and culture clearly impact their overall perceptions of the instruction and curriculum used within education in the U.S.

**Gendered Identity**

Research has suggested that Iraqi refugee women have had to redefine their roles after resettlement to the U.S., often taking novel positions of power or influence within the family (Nelson, Hess, Isakson, & Goodkind, 2016). The burden of financial obligation put a significant amount of pressure on many of the participants, requiring three out of the five participants to seek employment once they arrived within the U.S. In
taking on new roles and positions of power within the family unit, Iraqi refugee women had to redefine their role as a wife and mother. One mother explained how her role shifted when she was resettled to the U.S. and became the sole provider for her children and family.

*Coming to this country [U.S.] I realized very quickly that the money was running out, and I would be on my own to provide for my children. I came from a country with a good job and a lot of support. I had a husband who could take care of us. But when I came here, I was a single mom of three kids with no support. Who is going to pay for the rent, for the food, for everything? I had to work.*

Resettlement forced some mothers into roles as the sole provider for her family as this quote illustrated. Furthermore, having had prominent roles and influence in their Iraqi communities, the mothers in this study shared how challenging it was to reframe their identities as educated women.

*When I first came here, it was very hard to get a job. I tried to get a job working in my field, but they wouldn’t let me. To be a doctor in the U.S., I would have to take the MLA, which has three steps. This is very hard for a single mom with no support. No support. I have a high medical degree and over 16 years of experience in the medical field, and it means nothing here.*

This shift in identity not only challenged the notions of traditional Iraqi gender roles and identity as educated women, it required the women to adapt to a new set of employment expectations and norms within the United States. Researchers Batalova, Fix, and Bachmeier (2016) connected this phenomenon of the underutilization of highly educated and skilled immigrant families to the term ‘brain waste’. Batalova et al. explained that within the U.S. there is a perception that the quality of education and credentials earned abroad may not be congruent with expectations in the U.S. education system, which was one reason some of the Iraqi mothers in this study felt that they were unable to obtain
positions. Other reasons that skilled workforce was underutilized was due to a lack of command of the English language, race, and ethnicity (Batalova, Fix, & Bachmeier, 2016). Connecting back to parent engagement, this quote illustrates that educators need to recognize the institutional barriers present for Iraqi families that may impact their involvement in their children’s education.

*I finally found a job that would accept me and then once I started working I had no time to be with my children. I was tired from working. I would go to work early in the morning and then I wouldn’t reach home until six or seven, exhausted tired. You know, when we start work in my country [Iraq], we started at 8:00 a.m. and finished at 2:00 p.m. And most of the people there worked across the street from their home. They just went home around 2:15 or 2:30, and had all day to spend with their family. Here it is not the same.*

While this description of a typical day of work may not be reflective of the widespread employment experiences of Iraqi people due to the varied class structures present in Iraq (Robson, 1996), this one mother’s description of the employment norms helps to further illustrate how Iraqi refugee mothers have to continually negotiate their own experiences and values through after resettlement in the U.S. Furthermore, this quote shows, not only are the employment norms different between Iraq and the U.S., the expectations placed upon the mothers within employment may impact their ability to support their children in their education.

As the mothers began to work to provide for their families, the mothers also experienced disillusionment connected to the realities of the economic differences between the Iraq and U.S.

*You have to understand. In Iraq, there are no taxes. No taxes on income. No taxes to buy anything. So, coming here, to this country [U.S.], to work, even if you work harder they will tax you more, so you get nothing. Here in America, you can get anything you want. But with it you get a mortgage, financing, interest, and debt.*
We didn’t know debt in Iraq. In Iraq, you would be happy when you owned a house because you actually owned it. If you owned a car, you were happy. Here, everything is owned by the bank so you aren’t happy. If you lose your job, then you lose your home. You lose your car. I couldn’t risk this. I had to work for my children.

This illustrates the divergent experiences Iraqi mothers encountered when learning to navigate new social and economic systems in the U.S. For one mother, finding an employer who respected who she was as an Arab Muslim woman helped her to make connections in her new community. She said,

*When I first came here, I was too scared to leave my house for the first six months. Finally, my neighbor invited my daughter to play, and I finally started to explore my new world I was living in. Eventually we needed money, and I had to start working. My friend whose husband was a Muslim Indian asked me if I would like to work as a babysitter for a lady she knew. I was so scared at first, but my friend promised me that she was nice. So, I went to her house, met her, and found out that this lady used to work in Jordan with refugees. And in Lebanon! She knew how to treat Muslims and how to talk to Arabic women. So, I spent two years caring for her children. I used to cook for them, and they loved my rice!*

Finding someone who understood her culture and respected her religion was crucial for this participant to reestablish a social identity and feeling of connectedness in the U.S., reinforcing the idea that educators will have greater opportunity to meaningfully connect with Iraqi mother’s if they understand her cultural and religious values. In a study conducted with Iraqi refugee students in New York, Nykiel-Herbert (2010) explained that cultural knowledge is both overt and covert. Overt cultural aspects are typically visible and include aspects such as language, dress, food, art, or religious ceremonies (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). The covert side of cultural knowledge however is less visible and are reflective of the values, beliefs, attitudes, and gender roles where the rules of interaction are not as easy to explicitly explain as they are often subconscious (Nykiel-Herbert). To
authentically partner with Iraqi mothers, educators must be willing to search for the covert elements of culture, and as Nykie-Herbert suggested, this hidden knowledge may become more apparent through reflexivity and a recognition that stories can often reveal covert aspects of culture if they have the opportunity to be shared.

**Religious Identity**

For the Iraqi mothers within this study gendered identity was connected to religious identity, and as practicing Muslims their faith was an essential and defining part of their identity. Whether they were veiled or unveiled, each mother described the importance of her identity as a Muslim woman, and how this identity was challenged within schools.

Many mothers described the prevalence of fear, meaning that they felt many people were fearful of them because of how they dressed. One mother shared,

*The main perspective of others is fear. Especially us [Iraqi mothers]. We are wearing the hijab [head covering]. It is what Muslim women wear, and people are scared to see us. Even if we say ‘Hi, how are you?’ They are scared. So, in the schools, the educators, they have to work to change this mindset of the adults and the kids. Just because one guy is bad in Islam, it does not mean all Muslims are bad. The same is for white people. ‘Cause there are bad people everywhere.*

Iraqi mothers’ experiences were significantly impacted by how others interacted with them through what they describe as a perspective of fear. Another mother reinforced this feeling when she said, “*Here, things are different. I think people do not trust us, people from Iraq, or know about our culture. I think that teachers should understand my culture more and understand Islam.*” These quotes further implored educators to not only engage in reflexivity and recognize their own perceptions about people who follow Islam but to
take action to help change these “mindsets” and beliefs that are present within U.S. schools.

Within the discussions around fear and the impact on their religious identity, some of the mothers shared how this fear manifested within their children’s experiences at school. One mother shared the following situation her son encountered at his middle school:

> Other kids have been bullying my son. Two or three times there were these kids talking with my son, saying you are an Arab and you are a terrorist. He was so confused and came to me to ask me, ‘Why they are saying this to me?’ I was very worried about this and reported it directly to the school. I am very sure the other children are hearing this and taking this from their family... [who are] talking about Iraqi people as terrorists. Some kids even spit on his food when he was eating. That is something that happened a lot, but Alhamdulillah [thanks be to God], when we reported it, the principal was tough on the other students.

While still conveying her concern about her son’s experiences of discrimination at school, this mother’s words showed that she felt supported through the educator’s response to the incidents but implored them to do more. While there may have been resolution to these specific incidents for this mother, this quote demonstrates the impact of Iraqi families’ religious identity within their experiences in education and how the children of Iraqi refugee families can be the victims of misguided fear.

For the women who veiled, which means they wore the hijab (head covering), their religious identity was also important to their experiences of supporting their children within mainstream schools in the U.S. One veiled mother shared the experience of supporting her daughter when she said:

> My daughter, she has been wearing the hijab [head covering] since she was maybe 9-years-old. We came here when she was in 6th grade, and we were moved to an area with a lot of white people, so there were mostly white people in her
school. She spent the whole first semester without any friends. She would come home crying, saying ‘Nobody will talk to me Mom!’ My role was to support her. To tell her, ‘Honey, you have to be patient. Someday they will know you, and after they know you they will like you and be your friend.’ This was so hard to watch my daughter go through this. This is not good you know. Parents and educators have to work on this together.

In addition to having to support their children with overcoming misguided perceptions of what it means to wear a hijab as a Muslim woman and girl, many of the mothers shared their fears surrounding their ability to support their children with maintaining their religious values within a dominant culture who has different values and norms. One mother described her fears in relation to her children’s experiences within the school and how she hoped that her family’s religious values would be respected at school.

You [the researcher] know the situation here is different. It is not the same as Iraq. You [the researcher] know the situation; the situation between boys and girls. The boys and girls here are together always. This is not like this in Iraq. I think the teachers should understand my culture and Islam more and know what is respectful in our culture. How we dress [modestly]. Not having boys and girls playing all the time together. I wish the teacher can just understand the differences of our children, the differences in our religion, and what we believe.

For the Iraqi mothers in this study, religious values and beliefs were inseparable from education, and they had a deep desire to be understood in relation to their identity as Muslim women and as a family who follows Islam. In Iraq, children typically attend gender segregated schools so the co-educational setup of mainstream schools in the U.S. can present a major source of anxiety for both parents and their children (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). Another mother shared,

I wasn’t scared about education when I came here [to the U.S.]. I was scared about the social things. Even with my youngest one. Every time I talk to him, I remind him that he is different. He is in high-school right now, and I tell him there are a lot of good things here, but there are also many things we cannot do. Things
that are not good for us. This is our struggle as Muslim moms and what is most scary to be honest.

Another mother followed this sentiment saying, “Our role is to provide them with a healthy environment in the house. We have to teach them the right path, follow them, and give them advice.” Supporting their children through each obstacle or encounter that challenged their identity as followers of Islam was a significant priority for each mother and a role she took very seriously.

When looking specifically through the lens of identity and its connection to each participant’s perceived role in her child’s education, many of the mothers described how her role within her family had shifted in response to her resettlement within the U.S. Recognizing that schools often look at parent engagement through a traditional lens, the participants within this study discussed how they were limited in their ability to support their children within the walls of the school and that they primarily viewed their support through home-based involvement activities. This connection to home-based involvement supported Shumow and Miller’s (2001) research that suggested that parents are often deeply involved at home in ways that are important to their students and families. The way they supported their children directly coincided with their beliefs and values as Iraqi Muslim women. Each mother’s narrative captured her role as all-encompassing and inseparable from her identity as an Iraqi and Muslim woman which adds another dimension to the research surrounding parent engagement. For Iraqi mothers, their cultural and religious values and beliefs are inseparable from education. As Quisumbing (2017) explained, values transcend the barriers of culture, race, gender, and creed and
have the potential to reveal common goals or understandings that will support educators in bridging the culture gap.

**Scene Two: Efficacy**

“I try to teach them everything, not just education. As their mother, I have a big job. I have to teach them about life.” (Participant)

I sat silent and motionless on the small chair across the table from my son’s teacher, looking down at my purse I was clutching into my belly on my lap. I turned the purse strap over and over again and examined my nails with nervous anticipation. I was deep in thought, listening to my son’s teacher rummage through the thick folder with my son’s name on it when I heard the brisk footsteps and Arabic greeting Assalamu Alaikum (peace be upon you), behind me. I quickly responded with We Alaikum Salaam (and unto you, peace), glad to have the awkward silence broken. My son’s teacher breathed in a sigh of relief when seeing the interpreter and quickly took her seat, giving a quick smile to both of us.

While my children played happily with some blocks in the back corner of the room, the teacher opened the folder and pulled out the paper sitting on top of the stack. She closed the folder again putting both of her hands flat on the table. The teacher began the conference by telling me that she was so happy to have Ahmed in her class. In a swirl of information, she then began to explain all of my son’s literacy testing results and data to the interpreter. Pointing at the page she says, “You see here, yes here. He is improving.” Pausing, she points to another number on the page. “But here. This score. I am just not seeing the growth from him that I want to.”
She stops, turns her eyes back to me, and sits back to give the interpreter time to recount the information she told her. The teacher meets my eyes and shakes her eyes from side to side, pointing at the number that indicated my son was struggling while the interpreter explained what was said. With great concern, I tried asking questions to clarify what this meant for my son. I tried to get more information as I wanted to try to see how I could help him get better. What did this mean? Was there something wrong with my son? What does he need to do to get better? What can I do to help? The teacher gave general reassurances and then conveyed that we would wait for more information from the teacher who works with students who are like my son, learning English.

While I still was full of questions, the teacher quickly moved the conversation on to look at the next pages in the stack. She pulled out some of his writing and read me what he wrote, pointing to his illustrations. She showed me some of the math pages he had completed in class. When we had gone through those pages in the folder, she then said that we needed to wait for the other teacher to come and give more information. With that, the interpreter apologized and said she needs to quickly step out of the room to help another parent and said she would be back in a few moments.

After the interpreter left, the teacher and I again both awkwardly shifted in our seats in silence. After a few moments, she slowly asked me, “Do you remember... the year book ...form ...you... filled... out?” I think for a moment and she turned around to try to find a copy of the form but isn’t able to find one. As she turned back around I nodded, and said yes, as I was confident that I had filled it out and returned it with my son. My response seemed to slightly surprise the teacher. I typically only responded to Arabic or
spoke to the teacher in Arabic through the interpreter. What the teacher didn’t know is that I understood a lot of English, but I just did not feel confident speaking in English yet. I was afraid that I would miss something if I didn’t have an interpreter with me.

The teacher continued, “Well I didn’t see the form so I don’t know which yearbook package you are wanting to order. Did you want to order Ahmed a yearbook?” At this, I was a little confused. I understood what she was asking but I was so confused as I had already filled it out, and I thought I had indicated what I wanted on the form. Apparently, I must have missed returning the form to my son’s Friday folder after filling it out.

“And, did you see the field trip form I sent home? I haven’t received Ahmed’s back yet…” A moment of silence passed. “Did you get that, the field trip form? The paper I sent home about our trip to the zoo?”

My mind started processing through her questions as I recalled the events of the last week. I prided myself on making sure I did everything I could to complete anything my children needed for school and to really pay attention to all of the papers the school sent home. Could I have missed something? Will my son miss out on something? My head started spinning…

I remembered back to the last week. There were so many papers. At least twenty just in my youngest son’s folder. My other children had even more than him! I remember looking through each one carefully to try to make sense of everything. It felt like a maze sorting through the papers to see what was important, what needed to be sent back to the school, and what kind of work my son was doing in the school. I had a special box where
I kept everything and had a strict routine after school for the children, so I am not sure how I could have missed something.

I replayed the afternoon routine through my mind. Getting in my car I drove to the high-school to pick up my oldest son whose school ended earlier than the others. Next, I drove across town to the middle school and quickly picked up my middle son. My youngest son’s elementary school is the farthest away. When I pulled up to the curb at his school, he jumped in the car, and we began the fifteen-minute drive home. On the way home, I asked them all about their day, trying to put together the pieces of everything that happened at school.

When we finally got home, I knew they were all hungry so I quickly got out the snack I prepared for them earlier in the day. While I was getting their snack ready I had them change out of their school clothes, wash their hands, and put all of their school papers in a box on the table. They all came eagerly to the table and begin devouring the food I prepared for them. The lunch they ate at school was not enough and they came home so hungry. While they were eating I went through each of the papers in the box.

One by one, I pulled out each paper and tried to make sense of it. If a paper looked like it was work they completed in class, I tried to go over it with them to see how they did the work or ask them questions about it. If it seemed to be a note from a teacher or a paper that looked like it needed to be filled out and returned to the teacher, I either tried to use Google translate or gave it to my oldest son to read and interpret what is said.
When the kids were done eating, I had them all begin their homework for the evening. My oldest two sons generally got on the computer to do different reading and math programs that the teacher had assigned. I checked in as often as I could while they were working. Then with my youngest son, I sat and read his little paper books and give him a star on the front every time he read it correctly. We would read it together five times and then I would send it back to school with him. When he brought it back, he would get to choose a prize out a treasure box in his classroom. When homework was done, I made sure they had cleaned up everything and had put any important papers right back in their backpacks.

My mind wanders back to the yearbook and permission forms the teacher asked about. I remembered those forms. Yes, I knew I had filled them out. I put them in my son’s backpack myself! Coming back to the present, I looked up and exclaimed, “Yes!” shaking my head up and down to make sure she understood what I was telling her. Yes, I had filled out those forms. I remembered I had interrupted my oldest son from his computer program to explain them to me, and I filled them out for Ahmed and sent them back a few days ago.

The teacher nodded and smiled, saying she would look again through her papers. Relieved, I sat back, eagerly awaiting the next teacher to arrive so I could finally ask more about my son. I replayed her words in my head... “But here. This score. I am just not seeing the growth from him that I want to.” Her head shaking back and forth.

Pointing to the numbers. What did this mean for my son?
So often I wonder if I am really understanding everything I need to help my children. I was confident I had filled out those papers right, but now I am questioning myself. I am trying so hard to take care of everything they need for school and make sure I understand everything, but sometimes I feel so lost. The language is so hard. When we moved here I was given the chance to attend English classes but they did not provide daycare and I had no time, so I had to stop attending. No one can take my role here. I am all my children have, and everything I sacrifice for them. I have no time for myself. But I do wish that I could just have the language so that I could really feel like I could help my children again. Like I used to.

Interpretive Commentary Scene
Two: Reflections on Efficacy

Within this study, efficacy or a mother’s internal belief that she is capable of supporting her child was prevalent and demonstrated within this scene through her inner dialogue and interactions with the educators. Efficacy, both self-efficacy and collective efficacy, came to the surface through the individual stories shared by the participants throughout this study. The values within each mother’s identity surfaced when looking more closely at the notion of efficacy or each mother’s belief that she was capable of supporting her children in education. One consistent experience among the mothers was frustration they expressed in not feeling confident in their ability navigate the educational system within the U.S. As Iraqi women, they described how they would have been better equipped to support their children through the Iraqi education system, but here in the U.S., they had to rely heavily on educators or community supports. This section explores
self-efficacy and collective efficacy, connecting the larger narrative to the individual stories of each mother and her perceptions of her role in her child’s education.

**Self-Efficacy**

Thinking back to the notion of educational identity, many of the experiences the mothers’ shared about their own educational experiences in Iraq contrasted significantly with their experiences with education in the U.S. These contrasting experiences often resulted in feelings of low self-efficacy. Connecting back to the differences the mothers shared about the differences in the structure of the educational systems, several mothers expressed a feeling of inadequacy and frustration with not knowing how to navigate the U.S. educational system. One mother shared,

> The hardest thing is to understand the system. It was very challenging when we first came. We didn’t know anything about the schools and the school system. We didn’t know what he would have to do to reach a certain level, to graduate, to get a diploma, to go to college. We didn’t know the rules. Nobody explained those things to us.

Another mother continued to elaborate on this desire to understand how to navigate the educational system. She said, “It was really hard to be new in the country and in a different culture, and you don’t understand the system. You don’t know how the kids learn in the class. What the teachers are like and how they teach.” Another mother shared:

> You [directed at the researcher] graduated from here. You can explain to your children how things work. But I did not graduate from here, so I cannot help to explain how things work for him [her son]. He has to struggle through it. He has to take classes, discovering later that this was not the class he needed for his studies. It is very hard to not be able to help him.
As mothers, coming from a culture where they knew how to support their child through the educational system, navigating the educational system in the U.S. became a point of contention and impacted their feelings of self-efficacy. Supporting the literature surrounding navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), this mother and her child had to draw from their limited previous experiences in a divergent educational context to attempt to maneuver the educational system in the U.S. While her feelings of efficacy were low, this demonstrates that diverse families still have resiliency and an ability to leverage their assets in order to succeed.

Another example of how the contrasting educational systems impacted Iraqi mothers can be seen through their understanding about their expectations relating to involvement within their child’s education. One mother shared,

*In the Middle East, in our culture, the mother spends a lot of time with her kids to teach them. To be honest, here [in the U.S.], at the beginning, I thought that it would be the same. So, I was sitting with them and said, ‘Okay, let me help you, what do you need?’ And then I discovered they know everything, and they do it differently here. The school and the system is different. Most of the studying is done in the school, not at the home, so they don’t need any help from the mother. Barely.*

The conflict between each mother’s understanding of the expectations required of her in supporting her child with education in her native country and in the U.S. is at the heart of how she perceives her role within her child’s education. In other words, there is a disconnect between the expectations of students in Iraq and the U.S. which directly impacts the confidence of Iraqi mothers to be able to support their children with school.

Several mothers expressed that they felt that their role was to help support the teacher by helping their children at home with their homework. Subsequently however,
they also indicated that they did not feel confident in supporting their children with school work as they were not familiar with the learning progressions, curricular content, nor the pedagogical strategies. These concerns shared by the participants were congruent with Lee and Bowen’s (2006) research that suggested a parent’s ability to support their child within education may vary depending on their educational knowledge and confidence in navigating the school system.

For one mother, not having a clear understanding of the learning progressions and curriculum prevented her from feeling like she was capable of supporting her child with their work at home. She said, “Here it is completely different. They [teachers] give my children homework and encourage them to go to the internet to look for information. I don’t know how to help them with this.” This supports literature that has suggested parents may feel intimidated by the curriculum, causing low self-esteem and a parents’ lack of confidence in their ability to support their children with school (Flynn, 2007).

In addition to curriculum or what students were learning, this statement evidenced that the Iraqi mother’s also feel lower efficacy relating to their understanding of how children are expected to learn in the U.S. The methods and strategies that educators in the U.S. utilize for instruction, specifically the use of technology, became a hurdle for Iraqi mothers trying to support their children at home. One mother shared,

*They [U.S. education system] are so different, not like us [Iraqi education system] We [Iraqi people] are used to just studying in the school. No internet. But here is different. You must have internet. We had to buy four computers for our children to use in the school. The technology is so different for us. In my country, we just have books, and we use them to study. We don’t have any experience with the internet.*
Supporting Yacoub’s (2013) research that suggested Arab mothers encountered challenges supporting their children with math in part due to the differences within teaching methods between the mothers’ native country and the U.S., one mother explained how she felt that she couldn’t help her child who was attending middle school with his math because she was worried she would teach him the wrong way to complete the problem. She explained,

*Once I tried to help my son, just to teach him on a math problem he was having a hard time with. I found that there is a big difference between how the school teaches him to do it and how I was trying to teach him. I was so worried I was teaching him the wrong way. So, I started to teach them instead to highlight the objective and to go ask the teacher, to ask them to explain to them how to do the work, because I can’t explain it to them.*

In addition to lacking confidence with supporting their children with technology and math, language was another prominent barrier revealed by each mother that impacted her feeling of efficacy with supporting her children with school. One mother explained,

*I really wish I had the language to be able to help her [participant’s daughter]. Sometimes when she speaks with me I do not understand her and do not know what she needs. I really need the language [English] to be able to help her. This is my job, to learn English, so that I can help her.*

Another mother shared a similar sentiment about how the challenges of learning the English language impacted her feelings about her ability to support her child in their education. She said, “The language is just so different, so it was hard in the beginning. The format! The format was so different you know. Going from right to left or left to right. It was so confusing.” The concerns each mother shared about their lack of efficacy with language was a finding that echoed another study conducted by Lahman and Park
(2004), where Korean and Chinese sojourner and immigrant parents expressed concern that they would not be able to participate meaningfully due to the language barriers.

While each mother primarily expressed feelings tied to low self-efficacy and verbally discredited their own ability to help their children with education, the conversations surrounding the artifacts the mothers collected for the final interviews reflected a different tone. The mothers who had children in elementary school proudly shared artifacts of school work that they had helped their children with at home and felt best represented their role in supporting their children’s education.

Figure 7. *Artifact 1 Showing Support of Elementary-aged Student.*

Figure 7 shows a small decodable book that one mother proudly talked about in relation to her support of her children at home. She explained that she helps her son read through the book once each night of the week. She said,
I have to give him a star or happy face when he reads the book good to me. I give him a check if I think maybe he needs to practice it some more. Then I send it back to the school, and the teacher sees this. She sees I helped him at home, and this helps her.

There is a sense of pride tied to this mother’s ability to teach her child to read collaboratively with the teacher, as her marking her child’s success with reading the text helps the teacher. These findings echo research that suggests parent engagement is an attempt by parents to authentically impact what transpires around their children at school and a desire to support children in ways that they feel are valued in the school (Barton et al., 2004).

Another mother of an elementary aged child proudly shared her daughter’s picture entitled “My Family.” Figure 8 shows a picture that the participant’s daughter drew with her support. She proudly explained how she sat next to her daughter and encouraged her to write the words and to draw everyone in their family.

Figure 8. Artifact 2 Showing Support of Elementary-aged Student.
Mothers of secondary education students shared artifacts that included their children’s high-school diplomas, certificates of accomplishment, current grades, report cards, awards, and family pictures. While those artifacts had identifying information, and cannot be published within this dissertation, these items additionally reflected each mother’s deep pride in her child’s accomplishments.

One mother shared, in reference to her son’s certificate awarded by the Migration and Refugee Services, that she was so proud that her son was recognized for his support of other refugees in their community. In being given a meaningful and specific role for supporting a task their child needed to complete at home, the mother’s feelings of self-efficacy notably increased. She explained,

*See, I like to help people, and I show this to my children so that they follow and do this like me. When I became more comfortable here, I wanted to find a way to help people, so I would go to the hospital every Monday to give special haircuts for free to the kids. One girl, I was able to actually save her hair! So, the big guys, the great people in the hospital, they gave me a certificate to say thank you for all of my help in the hospital. I really love to help people and take care of them. So, my son saw this, and he helped out too. This made me so proud. I am teaching my kids in the right way, to take the right path.*

For this mother who had older children, this quote illustrates how she took her role very seriously with regard to teaching her children how to be good citizens and community members. This supports the literature suggesting that each Iraqi mother, or minority family, possesses funds of knowledge that can be leveraged in support of their children’s education (Gabriel, 2011).

With the exception of sharing the artifacts, for many Iraqi refugee mothers in this study, self-efficacy was significantly lacking as evidenced by their stories and
experiences in helping their children with school. However, while their self-efficacy may have been low, their collective efficacy emerged as a strength.

**Collective Efficacy**

Collective efficacy, or a group’s shared belief in its ability to achieve a desired outcome, has dominated the contemporary literature about educational movements promoting student achievement through building the collective efficacy of educators (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2016; Donohoo, 2017; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Congruent with Lee and Bowen’s (2006) research that suggested the cultural capital a family possesses will in turn reflect the power they have in terms of their children’s education, Iraqi mothers expressed greater confidence in their ability to advocate for and support their children when they had support, whether this support came from family or from educators. This support was expressed through the notion of collective efficacy; the greater the support system a mother had the more voice she felt she had. In the context of this research, collective efficacy is looked at as the shared belief of Iraqi refugee mothers to support their children as a collective Iraqi community.

Supporting the notion of familial and social capital (Yosso, 2005), the first examples of collective efficacy that surfaced demonstrated the value of collective efficacy for Iraqi mothers within their community, and its connection to their ethnic identity as Iraqi women. One mother reminisced about the importance of community in Iraq.

*Back home in Iraq, we have a huge family and community that helped me to watch my children so I didn’t ever need daycare. Even when I was working, I knew that my children were taken care of them. Here it is different though. I wish to have that community again, and InshAllah (God willing), one day when I have*
grandchildren, I will get to stay home and take care of them and give my children this gift.

After moving to the U.S., regardless of their tribal affiliation or religious sect of Islam each mother followed, once Iraqi mothers were connected together they became “family” and created a new community. One mother shared, “With Iraqis, they like to stay in one place together. Maybe because we are like a family.” Another mother explained how finding other Iraqi mothers gave her a feeling of support when she arrived. She explained,

At the beginning you know, I was scared to come here [the U.S.] as it is such a big country, and I don’t know anybody here, or have any friends or family. And when we first came here, everyone was busy with work, so it took a little while to find each other. We looked for each other. To be honest though, we found each other by chance. Iraqi people are social people, and we love to gather and make events together. So, when we would meet another Iraqi family, we would introduce ourselves, have lunch or dinner together, and it would feel like we had known them for twenty years or more. See, Iraqi people are very, very, very social, and our life back home is social. Finding our new family here made us feel like we are home again.

As this explanation suggests, Iraqi women began to gain confidence when they were able to build relationships with other Iraqi families within the community. These positive relationships translated into increased efficacy as they felt that they now had a community surrounding them that could help them in raising their children with the cultural and religious values they held dear. Supporting the literature on collectivist culture, the emphasis on group identity, and social responsibility of every member of a group to support one another (Trumbull et al., 2001), one mother expanded on this notion of collective efficacy when she said that,

We needed to find each other, ones like us and who follow our culture. We need our children to be attached to us as parents and to be around other families like us. So that they know their culture, and they know their religion. This is the most important thing.
Iraqi mothers, while not having a large community to surround them here in the U.S., took their values of collectivism and reached out within their communities to make connections. Another mother explained more about how she felt safer with a community that supported her.

"You know in my culture, if we are even cooking something, we MUST go to our neighbor to invite them to come share our food. They will smell the food and may feel upset with us that we didn’t invite them, so we always invite them first. Back home, you have to say hi and greet your neighbors from the beginning of the street to the end, but here, things are different. I tried though in my neighborhood. I was scared, but I went to my neighbors and invited them for food. Slowly my neighbors started to know me and I knew them. And today, we are friends. I have a bigger family, and this makes me feel safer here."

Supporting the literature surrounding high and low-context cultural communication (Nishimura et al., 2009; Qingxue, 2003), high-context cultural values were reflected within this mother’s words, as she recognized how her actions impacted the social relationships around her, and her desire for close relationships increased her feelings of safety.

For Iraqi mothers, this sense of family is integral to their identity and feelings of efficacy. Another mother shared, “You know, for families like me, I finished my medical degree and school. My family supported me. So, I have to support my kids. I believe that the biggest part of this is the family. We have to work together.” These quotes illustrate that Iraqi mothers’ feelings of efficacy increased when Iraqi women viewed their strengths in relation to their families and communities, helping her to feel better equipped to support her children with their education. These findings further support the literature
that suggest that the cultural capital a family possesses will reflect the power they feel they have in terms of their children’s education (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

**Scene 3: Advocacy**

“I want them to remember me and say that they had good parents. I want them to remember that their parents worked hard and that we cared about them. That we fought for them. We care about them more than anything. They are our future.” (Participant)

Before I had the chance to again reply to my son’s teacher about the field trip form she had inquired about, another teacher who I didn’t recognize walked into the classroom and sat down at the table. I looked over my shoulder to see if the interpreter was following this new teacher, but she was not there. The two teachers began to talk quickly, my son’s teacher reviewing with her the conversation thus far.

The new teacher looked at me after a few moments, extended her arm to shake my hand and introduced herself. She said that she was the teacher who worked with all of the students who were learning English in the school. At this point, the teacher again opened the folder with Ahmed’s name and pulled out the paper that had raised so much concern earlier. My breath caught in my throat as I waited to hear more about their concerns. Again, I glanced back to see if there was any sign of the interpreter. Nothing. The hall was empty and silent.

The new teacher began telling me, as slowly as she could, that my son was not growing at the same pace as his peers in his class in reading. They pulled out another document called a Read Plan and told me that I needed to sign this paper, for the state, because his scores weren’t high enough. The teacher put the papers in front of me and
extended a pen to me. She leaned across the table and pointed to where she needed me to sign the paper.

These papers. What were they really? All I know is that my son isn’t reading well enough, and they tell me to sign a paper? But what does all of this really mean? My questions keep coming back to the forefront of my mind. What does this mean for my son? Is there something wrong with him? What should I do to help him? I wish I had a way to ask them!

I picked up the pen feeling conflicted, not knowing how to express all of the questions I had. They both looked at me expectantly. Right before I was going to sign the document, I heard the anticipated voice of the interpreter behind me, apologizing for the delay. I was so relieved. I felt like I could breathe again.

I quickly, in Arabic, told the interpreter what I understood about the information the teachers had shared. She confirmed what I had heard, and then stopped, seeming a little confused, and looked up at the teachers. In English, she started asking them questions. “So, Ahmed is on a Read Plan and you need her to sign it?” The teachers nodded. “But what does this plan mean? What does this do for Ahmed?” The two teachers glanced at each other quickly and immediately responded, “OH! Yes, of course! Sorry! We didn’t go over that, did we. This plan means that Ahmed will receive extra support and services in the school to help him with his reading.”

The interpreter quickly filled in the holes to my understanding and helped me to understand that there was nothing wrong with my son. That he was just going to get some extra support so that he could catch up with everyone else in his class. At this moment, I
realized how lucky I was to have someone like Nora, my interpreter. Nora is actually more than an interpreter for me. She is what the school district calls an Arabic Family Liaison. She has truly saved my family in so many ways, and I don’t know how I would understand how everything works without her! She helps me to communicate with the teachers and advocates for my children in the schools. She translates some of the big documents for the district into Arabic so that we can understand them when they are sent home. She is really the reason that I feel that I have a voice in my children’s education.

I have friends in other states who are not so lucky. They do not have anyone to help them understand the school system. No one to help the teachers understand our culture or our language. No one to advocate for their children when they are not there. No one to support them when they have to have tough conversations with teachers or administrators. For those of us that don’t have the language, the liaison helps us to find our voice in the schools. Helps us to share our questions and concerns with our children’s teachers. I am grateful. Grateful that even if I don’t have the language, that I still have a voice.

We all stood up from the little moon shaped table, shook hands, and smiled with relief that the conference was over. The mood was light, voices overlapping, and everyone walked more confidently towards the door of the classroom. I motioned to my children to clean up the toys they were playing with on the floor and, approaching the classroom door, parted ways with the teacher. Nora, the interpreter, and I walked together side by side through the hall, passing other parents waiting expectantly outside their classrooms for their turn to speak with their child’s teacher.
As I walk out of the school with my children giggling and playfully skipping along behind me, I am reminded of how blessed I am. While my life may not have turned out the way I thought it would, I am hopeful for the future. I am all my children have, so every day I have to stand up and be everything for them, so that they can achieve the future I hope for them. All of my hope is in my children. All my hope is in them.

Interpretive Commentary Scene Three: Reflections on Advocacy

Advocacy within the context of this research emerged through two different lenses. The first lens revealed advocacy from the perspective of Iraqi refugee mothers as advocates for their children’s success. The other lens reveals a perspective that views educators, specifically family liaisons, as advocates for Iraqi refugee students’ success and improved parent engagement.

Iraqi Refugee Mothers as Advocates

Advocacy played a significant role in Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences and perceptions of parent engagement, as they felt that they were the sometimes the lone champions for their children and their success. Connecting back to each mother’s identity and notions of efficacy, each mother had to pull from the strengths within her identity and gain confidence in order to speak up for their children when they felt that they needed to be the voice for their children. Some of their advocacy occurred in their communication directly with the schools, and some of their advocacy occurred within the context of this research where each mother had the opportunity to voice her perceptions and experiences.
According to the Iraqi mothers in this study, their role in supporting their children included creating a healthy home environment, advocating for their children when they encountered difficulty in schools, making sacrifices that prioritized their children’s success over their own needs, and helping to direct their children on the right path through imparting cultural and religious values and beliefs. Connecting to these perceptions of Iraqi refugee mothers’ role within her child’s education, Barton et al.’s (2004) research reminded us that that what parents do to engage in their children’s schooling provides less insight than considering how and why they engage the way they do.

Within the context of school, one mother explained how she perceived the school’s acceptance of her country and culture and how she hoped to advocate for educators to have greater understanding about their identity as Iraqi Americans.

*One of the big issues educators need to understand is the culture and language that the refugee children come from. They can maybe read about their culture if they don’t know about it. But they [teachers] can’t just pay attention to them [Iraqi refugee students] more, they need to give them more support and show them that you care about them. Sometimes we go to the high school, and they hang up flags all around the school from other countries. Except our country. No flag is hung for Iraq. It is sad. And what does this show us? That they [teachers] don’t care. At least, if they [schools] have Iraqi students in that school, they have to care. And if you [schools] are hanging up flags from other countries, then hang up ours [flag]. At least show us that you care with a small thing like a flag.*

This plea for acknowledgement and recognition of her family’s culture in her child’s school demonstrates that this mother has specific hopes for how the school can support her child, as well as how an inadvertent oversight on the part of a school can be very hurtful to Iraqi families. Similar to the scenario about the missing flag, another mother
provided an example of how she wishes the school would validate her sons culture through language. She explained,

> At least teachers, principals, and administration need to understand that these kids are different. That they come from different cultures, different countries, and different languages. At my son’s school, they teach French, Spanish, and even Chinese, but they don’t offer Arabic. So still, even when there are a lot of Arab students and families, we don’t have a voice in the school...to be honest.

This quote illustrates this mother’s desire to have a voice in her school community.

Another mother shared about a time she was disappointed by the school and how she advocated for her son and other students in the future who may be in a similar situation.

She described her experience when she said the following:

> Last year, my son got recognized or was supposed to get recognized for getting straight A’s in school. They sent me a letter to invite me to attend the special award ceremony they were supposed to have. I came, so proud of my son’s accomplishment. I sat through the entire ceremony, listening to all the names. Name by name. At the end, they didn’t announce his name. I became very frustrated. I sent an email to the principal and said that this is not acceptable, especially as we were sent an invitation to the ceremony. My son worked so hard for this, just like the other students, and at least you [the school] should read his name. If his name, or other names of other students were missing, it is a huge mistake and one that the kids have to pay for. Imagine what this says to the student, and to the family. The principal wrote back and said, ‘Oh, I’m sorry. There were a lot of names and some of the names must have been missed on mistake.’ I said that this is not acceptable.

This mother reached out to school leadership to advocate for her student and others, showing her expectation that her child would be recognized by the school in the same way the other students were. This example, along with the following mother’s story about her son in class, illustrate the mothers’ perception that educators do not treat all students in the school with equity and respect. Another mother shared the following story about
how she had to advocate for another Muslim student who attended her son’s school by
encouraging her son to talk to the school administration about an incident he witnessed:

_There was a boy who attended my son’s school. He was Muslim. There were two
other boys who kept teasing him, saying they don’t like him. So, the [two boys]
searched for a picture of a guy holding a gun that looked Middle Eastern. They
went up to the boy and held it in his face, pointing to him and laughing loudly
saying, ‘That’s him!’, trying to make the other students around him in the hall
laugh. My son was very hurt by this and told me about this. I told him to go
straight to the principal and tell them what happened. We have to stand up for
each other. The boys got suspended for three days._

Larger than individual experiences connected to religious identity within the
school are the frustrations some of the mothers shared about the school calendar and their
desire to be acknowledged and considered when the school district establishes recognized
holidays within the school. One mother shared,

_The school calendar at my son’s school goes from August to May, and they take
ten days off around Christmas. They don’t do anything for Islamic holidays. I
used to send a letter with my son, to explain that he would need to miss a day of
school for our celebration of Eid, because you know, we need to go and pray and
gather with the other families. Really, they need to recognize this as an official
holiday and allow them to be excused from school, but they only give them one
day a year. Really, they should give them at least two or three days. Even
Ramadan, this is the biggest one. We are all fasting, every day for one month,
even my son. This is our religion, we cannot change this. But the school, even
when they are fasting, they expect the students to participate in P.E. and physical
activities when their bodies have no energy. They [schools] need to have special
accommodations for students and these things. They [schools and districts] don’t
do anything for the Islamic holidays, but I try. I send my letters. I just wish they
would listen._

The Iraqi refugee mothers in this study, as evidenced in these findings, have tried to
advocate for their religious freedoms to be accommodated and recognized within schools,
with the limited resources they have. Another mother shared, “_My son can’t pray at the
school you know. We have to [as Muslims] pray five times a day, but we can’t do this_
here because there is no place for him to do this." Supporting Maloof and Ross-Sheriff’s (2003) conclusion that Islam is an entire way of life that transcends the walls of the classroom, these narratives from the mothers show that the religious identity of Iraqi mothers and their families cannot be looked at in isolation of the experiences with education in the U.S. and has played a prominent role in each mother’s advocacy within her child’s education.

More closely tied to ethnic identity, one Iraqi mother described a scenario in which she had to advocate for her son to a teacher who she felt was not treating her son fairly. She explained,

You know the school is like a second home for the kids, and the kids spend more time at the school than they do at home and spend more time with teachers. But I have one son who has a hard, hard, hard time going to the school. There are kids who try to pressure him to do bad things, but worse there is a teacher who he feels doesn’t like him. He told me about this teacher, he has her for photography. She told the class that in one week they will go to a field trip to the city and that they needed to bring a camera. She also said that, if someone doesn’t have a camera, that she had a lot and the kids could borrow one. Well, we didn’t have money or time to buy him one of this trip so I told my son to ask her to borrow one. He did, and she told my son that she would give him a camera for the next day during the trip. He was very excited for this trip you see. On the day of the trip, the teacher started handing out all of the cameras to the students who needed to borrow one, until it came to my son. When he reminded her that he needed one to borrow, she told him, ‘Sorry, I don’t have one for you’. He was the only one without a camera, and he felt it was because the teacher didn’t like him you know. My son felt very sad because he had a big project that was due, and he had to use all the pictures he took from this trip, but now he couldn’t do it. The other students offered to take some pictures from him, but he felt so discouraged that he was the only student who didn’t get one for the trip. Why not my son, you know? I never understood this. I always tell my children to just listen to the teacher. To just follow the directions and follow whatever she is saying. But I tell them too that, if they feel they need something from the teacher, they shouldn’t be shy to ask. The teachers should support them, not make them feel left out like this.
Another participant described how she wanted to advocate for her children to be put in classes that were more appropriate for her children by sharing the following:

*So, my kids are very clever you know, and maybe they don’t know English that well, but it doesn’t mean they are not smart. At the beginning when we came here, they put my daughter in the classes to teach her language you know, but they also put her in the low math class that was too easy for her. You know, math is where she is so strong. She is like a genius in math. She got so frustrated to be in this easy class. She would come home and complain that she didn’t need to be in the low class just because she didn’t speak English perfect. She knew numbers you know. So, I told her she just has to keep working hard to prove this to them. And finally, she got a teacher who saw what she was capable of and moved her from the regular class to the honors class. Finally.*

Advocacy for another mother was shown when she utilized school of choice to give her children and education that she felt would better meet the needs of her children, as her neighborhood school was a bilingual Spanish immersion school. She hoped that she could advocate in the future for a bus to service students that are in the same situation as her children. She said,

*When we moved into our neighborhood, our school for here is a school where they teach both Spanish and English. My kids though were still learning English, and I thought this would confuse them so much you know. The liaison helped me to get them into a different school, but I now had to drive them and have no access to the bus. The bus only takes them to that Spanish school, so I have to drive them but it is so hard because my kids are at different schools. I try to find a way for the district to get us a bus for these students, who are already learning a different language. I wish they had a school where there taught Arabic language.*

This family felt limited in their ability to access a school that they felt would best support the needs of their child. School of choice is one area in which district level educational policy has tried to give parents a voice within education, however as this quote illustrates, often choice is still very limiting for families and the “equality of opportunity hardly ever translates into equality of outcomes because of the role of structural factors that are
beyond the control of schools and teachers” (Bieta, 2009, p. 33). Furthermore, this quote illustrates that this Iraqi family was concerned with their child maintaining their native language, supporting the literature that indicates diverse families highly value language proficiency in English and their native language (Lahman & Park, 2004).

Iraqi mothers in this study also demonstrated advocacy and support of their children through their hard work and dedication to supporting them through school. One mother described how she supported her child best with home-based involvement:

*I really wish that I could participate with my child in the school. I wish I could, but I cannot. So, most of the time I help them with everything in the home. I know many parents, especially mothers, who can go in and go with their kids to the field trip or something like this, but I cannot. I am working you see, and I have no time. I cannot skip one day for work. I am a single mom, and I don’t have another parent here to help me. But I can help them in other ways you know.*

This quote reinforces the premise that this Iraqi refugee mother primarily perceived her influence within her child’s education within non-traditional notions of parent engagement, supporting the literature that parents often view their engagement in personal spaces and contexts relevant to the needs of their family (Barton et al., 2004; Epstein, 2009; Good, 2010). Supporting this, another mother shared,

*I feel my job is to be with them through everything and to teach them everything that helps them take the straight path. I have to teach them the right way to live life as a person you know. I am so close to them, and I sit with them and listen to them. I give them advice, you know, for their future.*

Echoing this mother’s comments, one participant reiterated the fact that Iraqi refugee mothers feel that their role is to do and be “everything” for her children. She explained,

*It [parent involvement] is very important. Really my job is to do everything and to continue at home with what the teacher wants. If they need help with homework, I follow up with them every day. I also take care of them, like making sure they*
As this quote explains, Iraqi mothers perceive their support of their children’s development within the family unit as foundational to their ability to support them within academics. One mother clarified that she felt the “teacher’s role is to teach my kids in the classroom. I am responsible for everything else, everything at home, everything that makes my son take the right path.”

In addition to advocating for her children within the schools and at home, the mothers within this research study also pulled from their identity as an Iraqi woman to promote their values and hopes for their children’s future. Significant to each mothers’ advocacy for her child’s future success were the stories that connected each mother’s familial values and cultural identity to her own experiences within education. One mother shared her parents’ expectations of her when she was a child and how that translated into her expectations for her children today. She explained,

*I was very clever when I was little, so my parents they expected me to be a doctor. And I wanted to be a doctor. See, my father was my biggest support. He encouraged me every year. Every year, he would buy me a gift because I would get all A’s, and this encouraged me to do well in school. So now I want to do the same for my kids. Support them with everything so that they don’t have to worry about any other responsibilities. This is our culture you know. Our parents did the same. We have to support them like this.*

Similar to this mother’s description of support, another mother shared how her encouragement of her children towards their future echoes what her parents did for her. She explained,
As this quote illustrates, each mother’s involvement in her child’s education takes on the distinct role of advocate. She became an advocate for her child’s rights and for their future, promoting her values and beliefs as well as supporting her children in school when they encountered challenging situations. Her role transcended traditional notions as she defined her impact and support of her child’s education through home-based involvement. Engagement to her is defined as everything she does, and everything she sacrifices to support her children. Furthermore, evidence of advocacy within this study was not limited to the mother’s perspectives of advocacy within their child’s education. Educators also emerged as powerful advocates that impacted Iraqi refugee mother’s perceptions of education and the nature of the partnerships she had with educators.

**Educators as Advocates**

Perhaps the most interesting finding within this study centered around the notion of educator advocacy. Educators, specifically those educators in a role as a family liaison, had a significant impact on the experiences of parent engagement for Iraqi refugee mothers in this study, and through educator advocacy, the nature of partnerships between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers emerged. Throughout the theme relating to efficacy, Iraqi mothers shared their feelings of inadequacy in being able to support their children with their education. This feeling however was minimized and counteracted for those
participants who felt they had an educator, or liaison, who advocated for them within the educational process. Two participants in this study expressed how invaluable their educational advocate was, while others discussed how they wish they had someone within education who truly understood their culture and what they needed.

The two participants who experienced the positive benefits of educational advocacy lived in a school district community that had a strong emphasis on parent engagement and had two Arabic Liaisons that supported the Arabic speaking community that attended those schools. One of the participants shared,

One of the most helpful things was having a family liaison who understood my language and my culture. She helped me with everything. Getting my kids enrolled in school, interpreting for me, and helping me to understand the school and how everything works.

When talking about the Arabic family liaison, she showed me an app called WhatsApp where the liaison had created a group for other mothers in her school community who spoke Arabic. This was a place where she could connect with other mothers and ask questions she had about her children’s education in her native language. For Iraqi mothers, the most effective partnerships with educators resulted from relationships with a cultural liaison who bridged cultural understandings and promoted more meaningful relationships between parents and educators.

In addition to the support provided by an Arabic family liaison, another mother attending the same district discussed her positive experience with the early childhood program that had a family mentor.

In my opinion, the schools here are very good especially with the support we had. Something helpful and beneficial was the family mentor who helped us with everything. When my daughter started preschool, I didn’t have to figure out the
big application by myself. They came and helped me fill everything out and then after my daughter was in the program, they came to my house every week to teach me how to help her at home. This was so helpful.

These quotes illustrate how families who had support from family liaisons felt that they had someone to advocate for them as they navigated through the education system in the U.S. While two out of the five had the support of a family liaison or mentor, the other three participants conveyed their desire for an educator who truly understood them and could speak for them. For example, one mother shared,

*I wish there was a good counselor or someone in the school who could speak our language and know our culture. Someone who could talk to the kids, talk to the parents, explain to us what is important. We don’t know what is true or what to do in the schools. Nobody can imagine this [the U.S.] education system before they are engaged in it. And to be honest, my son is struggling a lot. There is no one to show us the path. So, if there is a good counselor in each school, that speaks the language that the refugee speaks, and explains, especially to the mother, and to the kids, and who stays with them until they graduate, this would help a lot.*

Similarly, one mother shared how she hoped this person would be able to understand the culture from which they came from as she felt it would be support her children. She said,

*The key issue is that the teachers really have to understand the culture and language that the children come from. They could meet with the families more frequently and maybe even read more about their culture if they don’t know about it. Give those families, and their children, more support. Especially as those kids come from places of war. Most of them are already struggling a lot. Maybe they lost their father, lost their mom, lost their brother. It really is a hard break you know. So, they [educators] need to pay more attention to these kids and give them more support. They need to give us parents more, you know, understanding about our culture and religion and who we are.*

Another mother shared a similar hope and expanded how she feels that there needs to be person who is educated about how to not only help their families but who will advocate for them in the schools. She explains,
This is a big thing for educators to know. They need to make sure they are educated and understand who we are. They should be teachers to teach the other kids that nobody is really that different from another person and that we are all equal because we are all human. Please, they need to understand that we are not bad people and that there are bad people everywhere. This is the true role of the educator.

As these quotes illustrate, advocacy from the educators is a strong desire and valued support for Iraqi refugee mothers navigating the U.S. education system.

Educator advocacy emerged as a strength for some of the participants within this study, and this was as a direct result of having support through cultural liaisons and mentors. Schools and districts have the opportunity to more effectively capitalize on the strengths of Iraqi mothers and to build partnerships with them through cultural liaisons who are able to help bridge the culture gap between the home and school. By investing in cultural liaisons that reflect the diverse cultures represented within a school and district, educators can more effectively create partnerships that give both families and educators an equal voice in constructing a meaningful relationship (Kammen et al., 2014). Furthermore, by investing in educator advocacy through cultural liaisons, schools have a greater potential to partner with Iraqi refugee families in solidarity, where educators and Iraqi families can recognize their differences while still working together to achieve a common goal - the success of their children.

Summary

Chapter four took readers on a journey through the collective and individual narratives of the five Iraqi refugee mothers that participated in this study, connecting readers to the primary research question: How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their children’s education in the U.S. The stories of each mother also brought
greater clarity to the following sub-questions raised in this study: How does culture influence Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement? and What is the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers?

The findings were illustrated within three scenes that explored the three primary themes that emerged within the data analysis: (1) identity, (2) efficacy, and (3) advocacy. The reporting of the findings started with an exploration of the ways in which identity impacted the perceptions of Iraqi refugee mothers. The theme of identity, examined at the intersection of ethnic, gendered, educational, and religious identity, helped to provide the lens through which to view the remaining two themes, efficacy and advocacy. Efficacy was explored through the lenses of self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Finally, advocacy was looked at in relation to Iraqi mother’s advocacy for their children and the impact of educator advocacy.

The findings within this chapter supported much of the literature surrounding parent engagement but revealed some important distinctions that educators need to be mindful of when pursuing authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee mothers in the U.S. While the findings from this study may be compelling for educators working closely with Iraqi refugee populations in their school, they are more suggestive than conclusive. In many respects, this study supported much of the literature surrounding parent engagement. Distinctively however, this study offered a rare glimpse into the perspectives of parent engagement captured through the narratives of five Iraqi refugee mothers who privileged us with access to their thoughts, feelings, and stories. Their voice within this study will hopefully help educators recognize not only how to better support
authentic partnerships with Iraqi families but will also allow educators to reflexively examine their own beliefs, perceptions, and role in advocating for Iraqi families within our schools. Chapter five will bring the bigger picture into focus by connecting the voices of Iraqi refugee mothers in this study to the implications for educators that will hopefully inspire change and foster authentic partnerships between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers.
CHAPTER V

BRINGING THE PICTURE INTO FOCUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

For Iraqi refugee families living in the U.S., mothers play an integral role in the education of their children. Despite the rising numbers of Iraqi refugees within classrooms across the U.S., the voices of Iraqi refugee mothers were missing within the literature surrounding parent engagement. Given the vital role of a mother in Iraqi family structure and the potential authentic partnerships with Iraqi mothers has for increased achievement of Iraqi refugee students in U.S. public schools, this study sought to bring greater understanding to the contextualized experiences of Iraqi refugee mothers and their perceptions of their role in their children’s education.

Framed within narrative case study methodology, this dissertation explored the perspectives and experiences of parent engagement through the lens of Iraqi refugee mothers in the U.S. This study sought to answer one primary research question: How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their children’s education in the United States? To gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives, the following sub-questions were also addressed: How does culture influence Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement? What is the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers?
Chapter four took readers on a journey through the collective and individual narratives of the participants within this study and illustrated the three primary themes: Identity, Efficacy, and Advocacy. Each primary theme was then looked at in relation to the subthemes identified within each primary theme. Identity was explored through a look at the intersections of ethnicity, gender, education, and religion. Efficacy was examined through the lenses of self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Finally, advocacy was considered from the vantage points of Iraqi mothers as advocates and of educators as advocates. Connections between the data and the literature were woven throughout the chapter.

Chapter five seeks to bring the picture into focus, connecting the voices of Iraqi refugee mothers revealed in chapter four to the implications of this study for educators, leaders, and policy makers. This chapter opens with a discussion about the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. Following this, the primary implications that will be discussed include a reflection on culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, and an acknowledgement of the leadership and organizational implications. Finally, as the voices of Iraqi refugee mothers are central to the contextualized experiences of parent engagement within this study, this chapter ends with a final narrative that gives Iraqi refugee mothers the final word and the opportunity to give educators a glimpse into a future that is possible.

**Limitations of Study and Recommendations for Further Research**

This study included the voices of five Iraqi mothers who were resettled to both the Eastern and the Western U.S. This research provided differing perspectives about parent
engagement based upon each mother’s experience within these regions of the U.S., however Iraqi refugee mothers may have had different experiences if they were resettled into other regions of the U.S. Furthermore, while the sample of participants reflected diversity through the ages of the participants’ children, their religious sect within Islam, and the number of years they had lived within the U.S., this study was limited in its ability to bring voice to Iraqi mothers who came from different ethnic or religious groups within Iraq. In order to address this limitation, further research could give voice to the experiences of mothers from other marginalized populations in Iraq such as Kurdish or Yazidi Iraqi refugees.

Furthermore, while meaningful parent engagement has been connected to positive educational outcomes for students coming from diverse populations, research has not been successful in prompting widespread change across the field of education. (Bauman et al., 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2012). With the increasing numbers of students entering classrooms from diverse populations and cultures (Tienda & Haskins, 2011), educators would benefit from further research exploring ways to create authentic partnerships with other cultural groups that are underrepresented within the literature. With the crisis unfolding in Syria and across the Arab world, and significant numbers of Syrian refugee families entering the United States (Zong & Batalova, 2017), educators would benefit from a contextualized look at perceptions of parent engagement through the lens of Syrian families. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) reminds us, parents are directly connected to all conversations surrounding student academic achievement outcomes, and educational leaders need research that gives them ideas about how to leverage resources
to build partnerships with the most influential people in a child’s life, their parents (Good, 2015; Grant & Ray, 2013).

**Implications of Major Findings**

At the heart of all discussions surrounding student achievement are parents, who want nothing more than the realization of all the hopes and dreams they have for their child (Good, 2010; Good, 2015; Schlechty, 2009). No other stakeholder has such an invested interest in positive outcomes for a student, so naturally, educators should strive to levy education's greatest resource – parents (Good, 2015; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). As the review of literature revealed, the voices of Iraqi refugee mothers in education were missing within the literature surrounding parent engagement in education. In contextualizing the experiences of parent engagement for Iraqi mothers in the U.S., this study not only gave insight about their perspectives but provided the opportunity for their counterstories to be placed on center stage in the dialogue surrounding their perceptions of parent engagement. Furthermore, the narratives each mother shared within this study provided an opportunity to legitimize the racialized and intersectional identities of Iraqi refugee mothers and offered a rare glimpse into the lived experiences that may have otherwise been inaccessible to their mainstream or white counterparts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Through these narratives educators, leaders, and policy makers can begin to see opportunities to refine parent engagement practices to be more culturally, linguistically, and relationally responsive to the needs of Iraqi families in the United States. After hearing the voices of Iraqi refugee mothers within this study, the implications outlined
below implore educators, leaders, and policy makers to take action to better meet the needs of not only Iraqi families in U.S. schools, but other marginalized communities living in the shadows of mainstream culture. In addition to the discussions of the implications this research has on the wider educational community, each section below also provides responsive solutions towards not only creating authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee mothers, but for pursuing more equitable educational practices that would better support *all* families in U.S. schools.

**Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy**

As education continues to reflect greater diversity than ever before, embracing multicultural approaches and affirming diversity (Nieto & Bode, 2012) within our schools is a moral imperative for educational leaders. Nieto and Bode (2012) argue that, while educators may be aware of the diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences present within U.S. schools, educators’ ability to use the information in a constructive way to leverage student achievement and create authentic partnerships with parents is still very limited. As evidenced by the in-depth individual and collective narratives of the Iraqi mothers within this study, partnerships with parents unfold within the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of education (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Pransky & Bailey, 2002), and educators have a responsibility to support students and families within the cultural spaces that are relevant to them. Furthermore, within this study, perceptions of education and parent engagement were strongly influenced by the cultural assumptions and beliefs of both parents and educators, which signals a need for a closer look at culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy.
Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined as teaching “to and through [students’] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” and is premised upon the interconnections between ethnicity, culture, and student achievement (Gay, 2010, p. 26). Taking culturally responsive pedagogy to another level, Ladson-Billings (2014) suggested that educators should embrace culturally sustaining pedagogy which combines the theoretical premises of culturally responsive pedagogy with practice that reflects a more fluid understanding of culture and engages questions of equity and social justice. Research has shown that students perform better academically when the culture of the classroom, behavior expectations, and instructional strategies reflect the culture of their homes (Delpit, 2006; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). While research has shown that many educators strive for culturally responsive pedagogy in hopes of bridging the culture gap and minimizing the institutional barriers for diverse populations (Good, 2010; Grant & Ray, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014), the findings within this study suggest that educators still have a long way to go in combating beliefs and attitudes that perpetuate negative perceptions of Iraqi refugee students and their families in schools.

The culture gap, or misalignment of the understanding between cultures within the educational system (Gay, 2013), was reflected through findings within the study that revealed that Iraqi mothers and their children experienced significant challenges, discrimination, and prejudice based upon their ethnic, gendered, and religious identity. Based upon the findings from this study, discrimination, while a sensitive topic given the present political and sociocultural climate, needs to be given more attention by educators
and policy makers. The instances of discrimination were not unique to one participant or their child within this study. Regrettably, these experiences were ubiquitous experiences for all of the families that participated within this research. These experiences of discrimination and prejudice are symptoms of deeply rooted societal and institutional issues, which as the data revealed, are present within schools as well. Societally, Iraqi, Arab, and Muslim communities experience discrimination through distortions in mass media and popular culture (AMEMSA, 2011; Birman, 2005; Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003; Nhuch, 2017), which inherently transfer into classrooms as educators and students bring the knowledge, ideas, and impressions about different ethnic groups based upon information they obtain from media that is often “inaccurate and frequently prejudicial” (Gay, 2002, p. 109). One contemporary example of this includes the executive orders emerging from the current Presidential Administration, which Nhuch (2017) described as painting a picture of refugees and immigrants as threats to public safety which, according to Nhuch, disturbingly parallels historical white supremacist policies. Societal influences such as political discourse and media have the potential to inhibit authentic partnerships with students and their families as misconceptions may not be readily corrected within an educational environment if it does not value culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). In being microcosms of the surrounding community, it is important to remember that schools often reflect the underlying culture and values of the dominant society (Barnhardt, 1981; Nieto & Bode, 2012). As Barnhardt (1981) explained, as long as schools “reflect the structure and social organization of the dominant society, they can be expected to perpetuate its values, attitudes, and behavior patterns” (p. 2). In order to
combat the negative discourse and discriminatory actions against Iraqi refugee and other marginalized families, educators have an opportunity to promote positive change within their classroom and within their school through building authentic and culturally responsive relationships with students and their parents and through stepping out with courage to have difficult conversations about the culture gap and experiences of discrimination some families face within U.S. schools (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Institutionally, Sleeter (2012) argued that a culture gap has been perpetuated in education as “culturally responsive pedagogy has been relegated to the margins” due to faulty conceptions of how to connect culturally responsive pedagogy to student achievement and because of an “elite and white fear of losing national and global hegemony” (p. 568). As Singleton and Linton (2006) explained, when white privilege persists within schools without acknowledgement, “white educators may experience difficulty seeing how different life is for students of color, whose race and racial culture are hypervisible” (p. 217). As research has shown, these culture gaps significantly impact student achievement and create institutional barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Gabriel, 2011; Gay, 2013; Gregory et al., 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012). A culture gap will continue to persist as long as the culture and values of Iraqi and other minority families are marginalized within schools (Gabriel, 2011; Gay, 2013; Gregory et al., 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Therefore, any progress gained in working with Iraqi refugee families and other diverse populations will only occur if educators overcome the barrier of internal belief systems that identify with a deficit perspective of the families served and shift towards a paradigm that views parents, and mothers, as an asset within
When participants were asked if they had any recommendations for educators, their first responses implored educators to seek greater understanding about Iraqi families, their history, values, beliefs, and aspirations. In order to truly understand and respond to this request and the educational needs of Iraqi refugee families within the U.S., educators must be willing to reflexively examine not only who their students are but who they themselves are as their beliefs and values strongly impact their teaching and ability to engage in authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee mothers in the U.S (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). Research has shown that, when teachers critically reflect upon their own beliefs, values, and assumptions about education, families, and students, teaching and learning is improved (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). As Henderson et al. (2007) explained, both parents and educators have attitudes, beliefs, and fears that can hinder authentic partnerships and create a culture gap within schools. Through a reflexive lens, Singleton and Linton (2006) explained that educators need to examine their own personal interactions with family, friends, colleagues, students, and families in order to consciously place perceptions of race and culture at the center of the dialogue. As Singleton and Linton said, “educators cannot effectively consider their students’ attitudes and behaviors before they have carefully investigated their own” (p. 78). In other words, this study suggests that educators cannot authentically partner with Iraqi mothers and other diverse parents if they don’t examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes about race, culture, and religion. By engaging in reflexivity and seeking understanding
about Iraqi refugee students and their families, educators have the ability to begin breaking down the institutional barriers present within mainstream schools in the U.S. for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

According to Gay (2002), the knowledge that teachers need to have to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy and authentic parent engagement goes beyond “mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express values in various ways” (p. 107). Instead, Gay suggested that educators need to develop a cultural diversity knowledge base, design culturally relevant curricula, demonstrate caring by building learning communities conducive to learning for ethnically diverse students, and learn effective cross-cultural communication. Ladson-Billings (2014) supported this when she explained that in contemporary education, practitioners need to evolve in new ways that support more dynamic views of culture. In order to evolve in understanding of the cultures of students and their families, Singleton and Linton (2006) suggested that the unconscious veil of color blindness and silence needs to be lifted so that educators can develop a new consciousness that is humane and productive, and within a pursuit of equity there needs to be an emerging sense of empathy for diverse populations.

Connecting back to the aspect of cross-cultural communication, one of the most critical aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy includes an educator’s ability to not only build a foundational knowledge of cultural diversity but to effectively communicate with diverse populations. Mainstream schools and educators tend towards low-context communication styles in which dialogue is often direct, linear, precise, and deductive
whereas Iraqi families tend to reflect high-context communication where discourse may often be indirect, circular, and symbolic (Gay, 2002; Hall & Hall, 1990; Nishimura et al., 2009; Qingxue, 2003; Westbrook, 2014). In order to effectively partner with Iraqi refugee mothers and other diverse families, educators need to build an understanding of the differences in communication expectations of the students and families within their classrooms. As Gay (2002) explained in the following:

These (and other) differences in ethnic communication styles have many implications for culturally responsive teaching. Understanding them is necessary to avoid violating the cultural values of ethnically diverse students in instructional communications; to better decipher their intellectual abilities, needs, and competencies; and to teach them style or code-shifting skills so that they can communicate in different ways with different people in different settings for different purposes. Therefore, *multicultural communication competency* is an important goal and component of culturally responsive teaching. (p. 112, emphasis in original)

As Gay’s (2002) explanation suggested, in order to avoid violating the cultural values of Iraqi refugee mothers in the U.S., educators need to strive towards communication that honors their experiences, identities, and abilities.

Furthermore, as indicated by the findings of this research, educators have a great opportunity to support Iraqi refugee families by investing in and promoting increased self-efficacy of Iraqi refugee mothers. Supporting research conducted by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), Iraqi mothers wanted to meaningfully contribute to their child’s education but were more likely to get involved when they felt that their involvement was needed and would support the teachers in the classroom. Iraqi mothers need to be given the tools and knowledge in order to support her children within an educational system that was not created with her in mind. Iraqi mothers expressed a deep desire to be a part
of “anything and everything” relating to their children’s education. They want to help teachers in ways that are meaningful and relevant. Connecting Iraqi mothers to the resources and tools they need to accomplish this will increase their efficacy and ability to support their children in ways that could potentially increase student achievement outcomes.

Given the challenges revealed in the narratives of Iraqi refugee mothers within their resettlement journey and in navigating the educational system in the U.S., it is also important to address the assumption educators may have that Iraqi refugees and other minority families are universally marginalized or disadvantaged. As Gay (2013) explained, marginality is contextual and relative, meaning that no person is powerless in all circumstances, and educators need to recognize the assets and funds of knowledge each family possesses. Connecting back to the need for reflexivity, it is important that educators check their assumptions and shift their perceptions that tie minority families to poverty, disadvantage, and underachievement. As illustrated within this study, each Iraqi refugee mother indicated that she had a college degree and her family, being highly educated, had high-expectations for their children’s educational achievement levels. Knowing this, educators need to affirm the funds of knowledge families have while removing the institutional barriers and systemic inequities that have the potential to marginalize them.

Education is a vehicle for engaging in social change, and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy can be the map that guides educators in helping promote positive changes for Iraqi families in the U.S. (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999; Sleeter,
Educators’ personal and professional growth through reflexivity, advocacy for diverse populations, and intentional pursuit of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy will foster a respect for diversity that will eventually transcend the walls of the school and into the surrounding communities, minimizing the potential for further marginalization of Iraqi and other minority communities. Given the far-reaching potential, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy should not be an optional approach to teaching. Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy should instead be viewed as an ethical and moral imperative.

Leadership and Organizational Implications

The findings within this study and the literature surrounding parent engagement suggest that educational leaders have a responsibility to promote the widespread use of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy in schools and authentic partnerships with Iraqi refugee and other culturally diverse families. Zhao (2009) said that, in order to advance the nation’s overall academic achievement and to narrow the achievement gap, educational leaders need to be more responsive to diverse student needs. Responsiveness, however, does not simply reflect high expectations of diverse populations and celebrating the cultures from which they come. Responsiveness instead begins with refocusing schooling on the educational needs of the children and families who are in our communities and developing values and policies that reflect the needs of these families (Singleton & Linton, 2006). As Singleton and Linton (2006) suggested, these values must exist “at the heart of the school’s educational philosophy, district policies, programmatic structures, and instructional practices” (p. 228). To this end, culturally responsive and
sustaining pedagogy is not simply about changing the practice of teachers; it is a political endeavor that has widespread leadership and organizational implications (Sleeter, 2012).

According to Sleeter (2012), education reform efforts attempting to work more productively with diverse populations have been deliberately “context-blind” since the 1990s as efforts have shifted from deepening multicultural and bilingual teaching approaches towards a focus on racial achievement gaps and efforts to standardize assessment, curricula, and pedagogy. Sleeter explained that through the 1970s during desegregation efforts, approaches were being utilized that sought to work more productively with diverse populations, but since the 1990s, “attention to culturally responsive pedagogy has been relegated to the margins” (p. 565). Furthermore, Sleeter argued that educational institutions give greater attention to efforts to standardize curricula and pedagogy instead of “deepening the culturally responsive, multicultural, and bilingual approaches to teaching” in part due to a fear that mainstream values may be lost if culturally responsive practices are embraced (p. 568). This can be seen when Sleeter said the following:

As the work of teachers is standardized and pressurized, attempts to work with culturally responsive pedagogy become increasingly difficult. Teachers have less time to research and develop curriculum that students can relate to, nontested curriculum disappears under pressure to raise test scores, and teachers are increasingly patrolled to make sure they are teaching the required curriculum, at the required pace. (p. 577).

Furthering this understanding of the impact of policy and educational reform efforts was Biesta’s (2004) suggestion that the present accountability systems within U.S. education reflect an emphasis on economics where the government and citizens are more concerned about the relationship between the state as a provider of a public service and the
taxpayers as consumers of this service than they are with relationships with students and their families. The connection between accountability and funding is evident through the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* where federal funding was prioritized for Title I schools demonstrating the highest performance through their ranking on statewide assessments (Biesta, 2009; Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). This emphasis on economics suggests that schools are primarily accountable to the state and the market while only indirectly accountable to families.

While there is educational legislation that has attempted to promote partnerships between educators and parents (CDE, 2017a; CDE, 2017b; CDE, 2017c; NEA, 2008; OSPI, 2016; United States Department of Education 2010), the mandates are significantly limited in their ability to provide educators with the tools and understanding they need to authentically partner with parents.

As Biesta (2009) explained, educational outcomes and in-turn teacher effectiveness has looked to evaluations and quantifiable data to determine the success of schools instead of keeping the questions of purpose central within discussions about what constitutes good education. This emphasis on data and evaluation suggests that cultural responsive pedagogy and parent engagement has been pushed to the margins as the focus on standards and high-stakes accountability has dominated policy (Biesta, 2004; Biesta, 2009; Sleeter, 2012). With the focus on school accountability, families are not prioritized in discussions surrounding student achievement and have little voice in current educational policy or school decisions (Biesta, 2004).
In light of the current educational policy environment, educational leaders need to begin reframing their thinking surrounding effectiveness to include considerations of responsiveness to the linguistically and culturally diverse families within our schools. Educational policies at the state and federal level need to more prominently reflect a commitment to families, giving them more voice within the educational process. With this commitment, state and federal agencies should prioritize funding for professional development aimed at increasing educator competency and capacity for supporting linguistically and culturally diverse families. Institutions of higher education could support these efforts through pre-service teacher preparation programs that prepare future educators to effectively partner with diverse families.

District personnel also have a responsibility to recognize parents as an invaluable resource (Coleman, 1998; Schlechty, 2009) and could positively support diverse families by examining the current institutional culture of the district and leading shifts that promote authentic partnerships with parents and culturally responsive pedagogy (Singleton & Linton, 2006). School-level leaders and principals are really the guiding force behind equity and authentic parent engagement efforts within a school (Singleton & Linton, 2006), and district level administrators need to prioritize intentional hiring and capacity building of leaders who will help to refine practice at the school level by providing educators with the tools and understanding they need to more authentically partner with diverse families.

This important work towards authentic parent engagement and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy is crucial and may be the key to closing the
achievement gap. It requires educational practitioners and school leaders to successfully navigate the cultural borders present between families and schools (Good, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006), and as Singleton and Linton (2006) suggested, three critical factors are necessary for success: passion, practice, and persistence. Passion, according to Singleton and Linton, is required to confront the challenges and resistance against change. Without practice however, passion is insufficient, as Singleton and Linton explained that practice reflects the institutional and individual actions taken to effectively educate every child with culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies. Finally, persistence is the willingness of schools and leaders to persevere in this work despite the political pressures, systemic inertia, or resistance to change (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 7). As Singleton & Linton (2006) explained, “Emboldened with passion, enabled with practice, and strengthened by persistence, we can create schools in which all students achieve at higher levels, achievement gaps are narrowed, and the racial predictability and disproportionality of high and low student achievement are eliminated” (p. 12, emphasis in original).

Through the pages of this dissertation highlighting the literature and the salient findings surrounding the perspectives of parent engagement through the lens of Iraqi refugee mothers, this study reveals that there is still much work to be done to authentically engage diverse families in U.S. public schools. Educational leaders have a moral and ethical responsibility to take the lead in shifting the conversations about student achievement and family culpability towards issues of social responsibility, justice, and equity (Gabriel, 2011; Good, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Singleton & Linton,
2006). Educators need to not only reframe their understanding about effective parent engagement of Iraqi refugee mothers, but engage in reflexive practice and culturally responsive pedagogy that would help them support other vulnerable families and their students.

As the voices of Iraqi refugee mothers were central to the contextualized experiences of parent engagement in this study, the final section of this study provides a final collective narrative that helps to give voice to the hopes and dreams the participants have for the future. Their words help educators to better understand the ethical and moral commitment needed from educators to more authentically engage Iraqi refugee mothers and their families within education, and have the potential to increase solidarity between educators and diverse families in the U.S. In solidarity with diverse families, educators and leaders have the ability to transcend the barriers of culture, race, gender, and creed as solidarity honors the common humanity and unifies educators and parents through a recognition of shared values.

**A Glimpse into the Future**

“My name is Mother. Mother means everything.” (Participant)

*Walking up the steps to my apartment with my children skipping along behind me, I can’t help but start thinking about the future. As a mother, my children are everything. And to my children, I am everything. As their mother, I have to be their voice and help them in any way that I can. When I think about my children’s future, I want them to achieve any dream they have. I want them to not only reach the goals they have, but to feel that they have a voice in this world.*
Someday, I would love to see educators as our advocates. Teachers have the biggest opportunity to teach the next generation of students the truth about me and my family. They need to understand that we are not bad people and need to stand up to those who suggest we are. They need to learn about our history, our culture, our religion, and our hopes for the future. They need to find their voice and stand for us when we have no choice but to be silent.

I dream of a day when my children and I can walk down the street without someone staring at us like we don’t belong. I dream of a day when I don’t feel that I have to compromise my values in order to make those around me more comfortable. I dream of a day when I don’t have to wipe my child’s tears after other children bullied him because of his name, religion, or how he looks. I dream of a day when the teachers in my children’s school understand my family and where we have come from, and can help to combat the ignorance and misinformation about Iraqi people. I dream of a day when I look up and see the Iraqi flag hanging with the flags from other countries around the world in my child’s school. I dream of the day when we feel like we are viewed as equal and treated with respect.

They say that the future belongs to those who dare to dream. I believe that our past, while it can never be forgotten, will not define our future. I will forever give thanks to Allah (God) for all that we have and regardless of what lies ahead, we are strong and we have hope for the future. While we may not understand why bad things have happened to us, we have a choice with how we choose to move into the future. We choose life. We choose hope. We choose to keep going every single day. I will never stop believing that
this future I dream of is possible. I need to believe that this world will change, as it must, for my children.
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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION NARRATIVE
Project Title: **Contextualizing Experiences of Parent Engagement: Iraqi Refugee Mothers’ Perceptions of their Role in their Child’s Education in the United States**

Researcher: **Heather N. Kholif**, University of Northern Colorado, Doctoral Candidate
Research Advisors: **Dr. Linda Vogel**, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
**Dr. Michael Cohen**, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

### A. Purpose

1. To promote academic achievement for all students, educational leaders need to leverage not only improved multicultural pedagogical practices and resources to improve instruction, they need to build successful partnerships with the most influential people in a child’s life, their parents (Good, 2015; Grant & Ray, 2013). Given the vital role of the mother in an Iraqi family structure, successful partnerships with Iraqi mothers will promote the greatest potential to support Iraqi refugee students in schools (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003; Yacoub, 2013). While there is a great deal of research surrounding parent involvement and engagement in schools and the positive effect on student achievement (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Epstein, 1995; Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali, 2014; Good, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Mapp, 2003; Sy, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009), there is little research surrounding parental engagement specifically with Iraqi refugee mothers in public education.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) reminds us that parents are directly connected to all conversations surrounding academic achievement outcomes despite their full understanding of the role they play in achieving success. I propose that a contextualized look at parent engagement from the viewpoint of the Iraqi refugee families themselves will give educators an even greater understanding of how to support this population within U.S. public schools. More specifically, gaining an understanding from the perspective of the mother will provide significant insight into experiences of parent engagement for Iraqi families.

The research questions guiding this study are:

- **Q1:** How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive their role in their children’s education in the United States?
  - a. How does culture influence Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement?
b. What is the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers?

2. This research project qualifies as expedited as it involves no more than minimal risk to participants and includes appropriate informed consent procedures. While the participants in this study are adults who are voluntarily participating, the participants within this study are a vulnerable population as refugees. The researcher will conduct observations of Iraqi refugee mothers at the local mosque, their homes, and any other locations invited to by the participants. Written permission has been obtained from board member of the mosque to speak with community members and conduct observations of those who volunteer for this study that might occur at the mosque. Two individual interviews will be conducted with willing participants who fit the selection criteria of study. Finally, a focus group interview will be completed with all of the selected participants together. The researcher will obtain consent from each adult participant interviewed in this study prior to any data collection.

B. Methods –

1. Participants

The participants within this study will include three to five Iraqi refugee mothers. Participants will be selected using purposeful sampling. Due to the nature of this research and the need to find participants that will yield the greatest amount of data, this study will have selection criteria that will be required of all participants.

Selection Criteria: The following includes the selection criteria for this study: (1) Iraqi Mother who came to the U.S. as a refugee; (2) Iraqi refugee mothers who have one or more children enrolled in school in any grade ranging from Pre-K to twelfth; (3) Iraqi refugee mothers who have had a child enrolled in a U.S. school for at least one year prior to participation in the study; (4) Iraqi refugee mothers who are comfortable sharing their experiences, responses, and opinions within an individual and group setting.

To being identifying a participant, I will begin conversations with some of my Arab friends at the local mosque and state university, asking them if they know Iraqi refugee mothers of school age children who may be interested in participating in a study that hopes to support educators’ understanding of how to best support Iraqi refugee families in schools. Once I have heard that there is a potential participant, I will ask my contact to connect with the participant to see if they would be interested in learning more about my study. If the potential participant is interested, then I will either reach out to the participant with a phone call or through an in-person meeting with the contact who introduced us, whichever is best for the participant. During the initial conversation with the participant I will provide them with more information and determine if they meet the selection criteria. Please see the attached script
that will guide this initial conversation with the potential participant. If they meet the selection criteria and are interested in participating in the study, I will go over the informed consent and then we will plan the observations and interviews during times that are convenient for the participants.

At the first in-person meeting with each participant, each participant will be given two copies of the informed consent, one for their records, and one that they will sign and return to me. Consent forms will be fully reviewed with the participant and signed prior to the commencement of data collection. All consent forms and interview questions will be transcribed into Arabic (the primary language of Iraq), and an interpreter will be provided if needed. The consent form will be read aloud in Arabic or English for any participants who may be unable to read the document. Once one participant is identified, snowball sampling will be employed to identify other potential participants and the process for initial contact and consent review will repeat until all participants are identified.

2. **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection within this inquiry will include 45 to 125 hours of observations, two individual interviews (approximately one hour each in length), one focus group interview (between one to two hours), and artifact collection. The research process will begin with five hours of observation of each participant. The first individual interviews will then occur with each participant. The observations will continue and then the focus group will occur with all the participants. Following the focus group will be a final individual interview that will include collection of the artifacts.

**Observations**

I propose 45-125 hours of field work (15 hours minimum with each participant). Focused observations will occur during Friday evening gatherings at the mosque in the private area where some of the women may meet weekly or during opportunities when I am invited to visit the women’s homes. Other observations may occur during informal gatherings (e.g. private meeting rooms within their apartment complex). Field notes will be written following each observation and will be expanded to capture as much of each experience as possible.

**Individual Interviews**

A total of two individual interviews last approximately one hour each will be conducted with each participant and will utilize a dialogic approach which will offer the opportunity to delve deeper into the experiences and feelings of each mother (Merriam, 1998). The first interview will occur after five hours of observation and the last will occur near the end of the research period, following the focus group interview. An interpreter will be utilized if needed during interviews, and all general interview questions will be transcribed into Arabic (the
primary language of Iraq) and will be given to each participant prior to any observations or interviews. If a participant speaks a language other than Arabic (minority languages could include Kurdish, Turkmen, Neo-Aramai, Mandaic, Shaba Ki, Armenian, Feyli Lurish, or Persian), all attempts will be made to provide transcription of the consent form and interpretation during interviews if needed. Each interview will be audio recorded with permission from the participant and transcribed approximately one week following the interview by the researcher. The interviews will be guided by a list of general questions designed to elicit a conversational response, however, the exact wording and direction of the interview will be dependent upon the responses of each participant (Merriam, 1998). The interviews will take place at a time and location convenient to the participants. The location will be private (i.e. in a private room with a closed door in the public library, a private room in the mosque, or in a participant’s home). All interviews and the focus group will be audio recorded with the permission of each participant.

Focus Group
After at least ten hours of observation and having completed the first individual interviews, a focus group interview will be conducted that will allow the participants to discuss their experiences openly within a homogenous group. The focus groups will start with introductions among participants, including an opportunity for each participant to write their choice of pseudonym on a table tent that will be placed in front of them during the discussion. Participants will be asked to try to call each other by these pseudonyms for the duration of the discussion to ensure confidentiality is maintained. Following this, the participants will be provided with another overview of the study and what to expect during the group interview. The focus group will be structured to be conducive to conversation, giving each participant space to discuss her experiences, perceptions, and thoughts within collective camaraderie and comfort. Participants will be seated in a circle within an environment that is comfortable for the participants (most likely at the mosque), and the conversation will last between one to two hours depending on the depth of the discussions that occurs. Approximately one week after the focus group, the audio recorded interview will be transcribed and any field notes captured during the interview will be expanded to include any structural notes (tone, word emphasis, body language) or affect that may need to be considered within the data analysis.

Photos of Artifacts
At the beginning of the study, each participant will be given a decorative photo box that will serve the purpose of a memory box. They will be asked to place at least ten things in their memory boxes that they feel are important and that may help me understand their experiences. Some of the items, or artifacts, may include photographs, trinkets, personal notes, or anything else that may be of significant to the participant. During the second individual interviews, each participant will
be asked to bring their memory box, and it will be the launching point for the conversation. Participants will be asked to share about each item they included and its significance to them. In addition to audio recording the second individual interview including a discussion of the artifacts, with permission from the participant, a digital picture will be taken of each artifact that the participants share and immediately following the interview notes will be written that detail important information from the interview, including emotion or non-verbal communications elicited during the interview. To protect the identity of all participants, any identifying information of any artifact photographed will be obscured. Participants will keep their memory box at the conclusion of the study.

2. **Data Analysis Procedures**

Field notes, individual interview transcriptions, focus groups discussion results, and pictures of the artifacts (e.g. items in the memory box, family photographs, flyers, pictures, and distributions from the mosque) will be collected and reviewed. Within an iterative data analysis process, the data analysis will be consistent and recurring throughout the research process allowing for reflexivity in the development of meaning within the narratives. Within a narrative framework, the data must be initially analyzed for elements of story such as plot, characters, setting and context, time or chronology, motives, and life lessons (Yamasaki, Sharf, & Harter, 2014). The storied experiences of the participants will emerge through the observations and interviews and will be looked at more closely through thematic analysis. In order to conduct thematic analysis, the data collected from the interviews and observational notes will be open coded and then axial coded. Once axial coding is complete, the data will be collapsed and combined in order to identify any significant themes related to the research questions.

3. **Data Handling Procedures**

The recordings, field notes, artifact images, and transcripts of the interviews (that have no participant identifiers) will be kept by researchers in secure locked file cabinets and on password protected computers for the duration of the project. None of the materials collected or generated, aside from the demographic questionnaire and the consent form, will contain identifiable information, and the demographic questionnaire and consent form will be kept separate from all other materials for this project. The researcher will keep the participant names and identifiers confidential by keeping all data identifiers, including consent forms and demographic questionnaires, in a locked cabinet within a UNC professor research advisor’s office. Upon completion of the study, all digital data will be transferred to a flash drive, deleted from the computer, and kept in a locked file cabinet in the lead researcher’s office. All identifying information, including participant demographic forms and other documents with participant identifiers will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. Pseudonyms will be used for any presentations or publications that may result from this study.
C. Risks, Discomforts and Benefits
There is minimal risk to being involved in this research. Participants may be sharing personal views with someone outside their typical social network, and the information will be the basis of a research report, although every measure will be taken to ensure confidentiality as discussed above. Culturally, these opinions and experiences would generally be kept private. The participants will be made aware of all potential risks associated with this study. Participants may benefit from their own reflections in answering the researchers’ questions. The findings of the study might also be used to positively inform, support, and change practices relating to the education and parent engagement of Iraqi refugee families in the United States P-12 education system.

D. Costs and Compensations
Other than time, there is no cost to being in this study. Participants will be given the memory box upon completion of the study along with a $100 gift card as compensation for their time. They will additionally be offered snacks, childcare, and transportation if needed for the individual and group interviews. If a mother needs childcare for younger children under the age of 12 during an individual or focus group interview, I will arrange to hire another woman from the Arab community, who the mothers are familiar with to watch the children during the interview in the participants home or at the mosque. I will offer to pay her $10 for each hour she watches the participants children. Any childcare costs, gift cards and memory boxes will be funded personally by the researcher.

E. Grant Information (if applicable)
The study is not funded by any grants.

Attachments to Application Include:

- Consent Document in English and Arabic
- Initial Contact with Participants Script
- Interview and Focus Group Questions
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

نموذج موافقة المشاركين في البحث العلمي
جامعة شمال كولورادو

Project Title: Contextualizing Experiences of Parent Engagement: Iraqi Refugee Mothers’ Perceptions of their Role in their Child’s Education in the United States

تهيئة مشاركة لتجارب أولياء الأمور
تصريحات الأمهات العراقيات اللاجئات لدورهن في عملية تعليم أبنائهن في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية

Researcher: Heather N. Kholif, University of Northern Colorado, Doctoral Candidate

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البريد الإلكتروني

Research advisors: Dr. Linda Vogel (Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies)
Dr. Michael Cohen (Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies)

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 michael.cohen@unco.edu

I am a graduate student at the University of Northern Colorado and am conducting a study about the experiences of parental engagement from the perspective of Iraqi refugee mothers who have one or more children attending school from preschool to twelfth grade. I hope to learn about these mom’s experiences with schools by learning about their perceptions of parent involvement and the roles and responsibilities they have in supporting their children’s academic success. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have important views and experiences that will help educators learn to better support families like yours. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

أنا طالبة دراسات عليا في جامعة شمال كولورادو، أقوم بإجراء دراسة عن تجارب مشاركة أولياء الأمور من وجهة نظر الأمهات اللاجئات العراقيات من لديهن طفل أو أكثر. أتمنى من مدارسنا الحضانة إلى الصف الثاني عشر. أتمنى أن تتعلم من خبرات الأمهات مع المدارس عن طريق التعلم عن تجارباتهم للمشاركة أولياء الأمور ودورهم في دعم النجاح الأكاديمي للأطفال. هذه الدعوة موجهة للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة لأن لديك وجهات نظر هامة وخبرات تتعلق نمو الأولاد بشدة. الرجاء التفكير في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة طوعية تماما.

This study will explore, document, and record in words and through artifacts your perceptions...
and experiences of parent engagement. If you agree to participate you will be invited to participate in three activities related to this study:

- Two individual interviews (about 60 minutes each)
- One group interview with the other two or three participants in this study (60-90 minutes)
- Observations for 15 hours where I will be observing the different ways you are involved with helping their children succeed in school.

Observations could happen during your normal daily activities, during times you are taking care of your children or helping them with school, or during any activity you invite me to that you think may help me to understand parent engagement from your perspective. During these activities, you will be asked to share your thoughts and experiences related to ways you are involved both in your home and in your children’s schools. The interviews and observations will be scheduled during our first meeting at times and locations that are convenient for you. An interpreter will be provided during interviews if needed.

During the first individual interview, I will be giving you a memory box in which you will place items that may capture your experiences with supporting your child with education. I will share some ideas about the different kinds of things you may want to put in the box when we meet. We will discuss the items you chose to include in your memory box at the second individual interview, and with your permission. I may take photographs of the items you shared to be used as part of my data analysis. I will not take your items that you put in your box at any point in the research and any pictures taken of your artifacts will not be shared with anyone except my research advisors without your permission. You will get to keep the memory box after the study is completed. In addition to artifacts in your memory box, you may be asked to share with me documents related to parent involvement such as newsletters sent home from school, correspondence between you and your child’s teachers, handouts from school meetings or trainings provided to parents, and any other documents or artifacts which you think might be helpful in understanding parent engagement of Iraqi refugee families.

Page 2 of 5 (participant initials here/ signing page)
I will make every attempt to maximize confidentiality. Your name, address, children’s names, or any other links to your identity, or your family’s identity, will not be used in this study. All of your interview responses will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will be asked to give me a pseudonym, or fake name, that I will use in any publications or presentations related to this study. The questions that will be asked during interviews will all relate to your understanding of what parent engagement means to you and what it looks like in your family. No questions regarding your status as a refugee will be asked during any part of this research study. You will be given a copy of the interview questions before the interview starts, and you need only to answer the questions you feel comfortable with answering, giving you the option to pass on any question. During the focus group interview, all participants in the focus group will be asked to keep the content of the focus group conversations confidential as well.

All of your responses to the interview questions and our discussions during observations will be summarized and combined with the responses from the other participants in this study so that I can gain a deeper understanding of this topic. Your name or any personal links to your identity will not appear in any professional report of this research or be attached to the photograph of an artifact you have given me permission to share (see opt-in opportunity signature space below). All of the data collected and audio recordings will be kept on a password protected computer and in locked filing cabinets in the researcher’s office until the end of the study at which time it will be moved to a locked filing cabinet within a UNC research advisor’s office. Any information that could identify you, including consent form, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within a UNC advisor’s office during this research project and then will be destroyed within three years.
This study and its procedures have been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board. Your participation poses no foreseeable risk and nothing beyond what might occur in normal daily conversation. Your participation may provide insight for you about your own involvement with your child or children’s education as well as inform you about new ideas on how to strengthen your involvement. Benefits of participating in this study may include a new knowledge and understanding about creating authentic partnerships with schools. This knowledge and understanding can help schools and educators to better support Iraqi refugee students and their parents by engaging them in ways that are most meaningful to each family. The experiences and opinions you share may be used to positively inform, support, and change parent engagement practices in education. Additional benefits include being able to keep your memory box that will be given to you at the beginning of the study, as well as a gift card valued at $100 that will be given to you at the end of the study in order to compensate you for the time you invested during the observations and interviews. You will also be offered snacks, childcare, and transportation if needed for the individual and group interviews.

This study and its procedures have been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board. Your participation poses no foreseeable risk and nothing beyond what might occur in normal daily conversation. Your participation may provide insight for you about your own involvement with your child or children’s education as well as inform you about new ideas on how to strengthen your involvement. Benefits of participating in this study may include a new knowledge and understanding about creating authentic partnerships with schools. This knowledge and understanding can help schools and educators to better support Iraqi refugee students and their parents by engaging them in ways that are most meaningful to each family. The experiences and opinions you share may be used to positively inform, support, and change parent engagement practices in education. Additional benefits include being able to keep your memory box that will be given to you at the beginning of the study, as well as a gift card valued at $100 that will be given to you at the end of the study in order to compensate you for the time you invested during the observations and interviews. You will also be offered snacks, childcare, and transportation if needed for the individual and group interviews.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, McKee Hall, Room 418, Campus Box 103, Greeley, CO 80639 Office 970-351-2861 Fax 970-351-3334 www.unco.edu/ceeb/elsps

Page 4 of 5 (participant initials here/ محمد هنا)
Sincerely,
 بكل سرور

Heather N. Kholif
(970) 237-0760
khol8421@bears.unco.edu

If you agree to participate in this study please sign below:
إذا كنت توافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة يرجى التوقيع أدناه:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>توقيع</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>تاريخ</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher’s Signature</th>
<th>توقيع الباحث</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>تاريخ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Optional Permission for use of Photographs:
إذن اختياري لاستخدام الصور الفوتوغرافية

If you give Heather Kholif permission to use photographs of memory box items taken with a digital camera in professional presenttations or publications, please sign here:
إذا كنت تعطي إذن هيدر خليف لإستخدام الصور الخاصة بصندوق الذكريات و التي أتخذت من كاميرا رقمية للعرض المهني أو للنشر، يرجى التوقيع هنا:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>توقيع</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>تاريخ</th>
</tr>
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APPENDIX C

SCRIPT FOR INITIAL CONTACT
WITH PARTICIPANTS
PHONE SCRIPT FOR INITIAL CONVERSATION
WITH POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Assalamu-Alaikum (Peace be upon you)! My name is Heather Kholif and I am doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado. I am also a third-grade teacher that has the privilege of working with amazing families like yours and I am genuinely wanting to learn how to better support families like yours in my school. Supporting parents and families is something I care deeply about, so for my doctoral research I am conducting a study about the experiences of parental engagement from the perspective of Iraqi refugee mothers who have one or more children attending school from preschool to twelfth grade. I hope to learn about these mom’s experiences and perceptions of parent involvement and the roles and responsibilities they have in supporting their children’s academic success. A colleague of mine (insert name of colleague here) referred me to you, saying that you may be a great asset to this study.

In order to best understand the perspective of Iraqi refugee mothers I am needing to find an Iraqi refugee mother who has a child currently enrolled in school in pre-k through twelfth grade. I also need to find a refugee mother who has been living in the U.S for at least one year so that they have some experiences of parent engagement that they can talk about. Finally, I need to find someone who would be willing to participate in a few interviews and observations. Each of my participants will be compensated for their time and through this research have the ability to significantly support educators understanding about how to best support Iraqi refugee families within U.S. schools.

Do you think that this is something you may be interested in learning more about or a study would be interested in participating in? Do you have any questions?

(If the answer is yes, then…) Thank you so much! InshAllah (God Willing), we can get together soon. I really look forward to meeting you! When would be a good time for us to get together so that I can tell you more about this study and share with you the consent form that would need to be signed prior to your participation?

(If the answer is no, then…) I sincerely thank you for your time and consideration. Before I let you go, do you know of any other Iraqi refugee mothers that may meets these specific criteria and might be interested in participating in my study?

(At the conclusion of the conversation…) Salam (peace) and thank you so much for your time and support. Have a wonderful day!
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FORM
**CONTEXTUALIZING EXPERIENCES OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT: IRAQI REFUGEE MOTHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN THEIR CHILD’S EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES**

تهيئة مشاركة لتجارب أولياء الأمور
 мастويات الأمهات العراقيات للاجئات لدورهن في عملية تعليم أبنائيهن في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية

*Heather N. Kholif, Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*

*University of Northern Colorado*

Phone: (970) 237-0760  Email: khol8421@bears.unco.edu

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**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

*الأسئلة الديموغرافية*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name:</th>
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<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status (Circle One):</th>
<th>Married</th>
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<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Widowed</th>
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<tr>
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<td>مطلقة زوجة</td>
<td>الأرامل</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Living with Spouse?</th>
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<tr>
<td>YES     NO</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If no, where does your Spouse live:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>لو كانت الإجابة لا، أين يقيم زوجك؟</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Language spoken in home:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>اللغة الرسمية في المنزل</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of Children (circle one):  0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7+  
كم عدد الأطفال

Information about your children
معلومات عن أطفالك

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Child</th>
<th>Age of Child</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Primary Language</th>
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What kind of school does your children attend (Circle One)?
أي مدرسة يذهب إليها أطفالك (اختار واحدة)

- Public School
- Private School
- Charter School
- Home Schooled
- Early Childhood Center
- المرحلة مدرسة

Do you work or study outside of the home?
هل تعملين أو تدرسين خارج المنزل؟

Job Title (if applicable):
المنصب الوظيفي (إذا كان)

Highest Educational Degree Attained (Circle One):
أعلى مؤهل دراسي حصلت عليه (اختار واحد)

- Completed High School
- Completed Certificate Training
- Completed Associates Degree
- Completed Bachelor's Degree
- Completed Graduate Degree
- أكملت المدرسة الثانوية
- شهادة الانتهاء من الدراسة
- شهادة البكالوريوس
- أكملت شهادة البكالوريوس
- أكملت شهادة الدراسات العليا

Degree studying (if applicable):
ما هو مؤهلك الدراسي (أو كان لديك مؤهل)

APPENDIX E

ENGLISH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
KEY FOR LINKING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Each interview question included on this document is connected to one of the following research questions driving this study.

Q1 - How do Iraqi refugee mothers perceive parent engagement and their role in their child’s education in the United States?

Q2 – How does culture influence Iraqi refugee mothers’ experiences of parent engagement?

Q3 – What is the nature of the partnerships formed between educators and Iraqi refugee mothers?

B – Background questions that will help build the contextual frame of the case.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions are simply a guide for the interview and may not include an exhaustive list of the questions that may be asked during the interview.

INTERVIEW # 1

1. Please start with telling me a little about your family and the journey you took that brought you to this area. (B)
   - How long have you lived here in (city) or the United States? (B)
   - Where did you live before you moved here? (B)
   - What do you like about living here? What is difficult about living here? (B)

2. I’d like you to think back to before you lived here in the United States. Tell me a memory you have of your own education or an experience you remember from when you went school. (B, Q2)
   - What age were you when you started and completed school? (Q2)
   - What country were you living in when you attended school? (Q2)
   - What expectations did your parents have for you? (Q2)
   - What did your parents do to support your learning? (Q2)
3. Tell me a little about your child’s experience attending school here. (B)
   - Did they attend another school prior to the school they are attending now? (B)
   - How many years has your child been attending school and what grade are they in? (B)
   - What do you think your child would say is their favorite thing about school? (B)

4. When you hear the term “parent engagement,” what does it mean to you? (Q1)
   - How would you define parent engagement? (Q1)
   - What does a successful partnership between home and school look like? (Q1)
   - Where do you mostly provide support for your child (i.e. at school? At home?) (Q1)

5. What do you feel is your role in supporting your child’s education? (Q1, Q2)
   - What do you feel is the teacher’s role / administrator’s role? (Q3)

6. What was your experience like when you first enrolled your child in school here in the United States? (Q1)
   - What was helpful through this process? (Q1)
   - What could have been changed that would have offered you more support? (Q3)

7. Could you tell me about any barriers you have encountered as a parent within the educational system in the U.S.? (Q1)
   - What do you think caused the barrier? (Q1, Q3)
   - Have you overcome this barrier? If so, how did you overcome the barrier? (Q3)
   - Are there any barriers you have not been able to overcome? (Q1)

8. Think about a time when you helped one of your children with school work. Tell me about your child and how you helped. (Q1)

9. What is easy and what is hard for you in regard to helping your child succeed in school? (Q1, Q2)

10. If you have questions or concerns about how your child is doing in school, who do you turn to for help? (Q1, Q2, Q3)

11. Are you currently involved in the school community? If so, in what ways? If not, why? (Q1, Q2, Q3)
What would encourage or support you with getting more involved in the school community? (Q1, Q3)

12. What are your expectations for your child’s education? (Q2)
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW: (Actual questions may vary depending on 1st interview)

A. What does parent engagement or parent involvement mean to you? (Q1)

B. Think back over all the times you have participated in your child’s education, and tell me about your most enjoyable memory. (Q1)

C. What do you feel is your role in supporting your child’s education? (Q1)

D. What are some things you do at home to support your child? (Q1)

E. What are some things that schools do, or should do, to strengthen the relationships between parents and teachers? What is something you wish they would do less of? (Q3)

F. What are some of the unique challenges Iraqi refugee families may face within the educational system in the U.S.? (Q2)

G. In what ways do you think your culture may impact how you support your child with school? (Q2)
   • How could educators better meet your needs in a way that honors your culture? (Q2)

H. If you could change one thing to improve your child’s educational experience, what would you change? (Q1, Q3)

I. Suppose you could give educators one piece of advice about how to best support you and your child, what would you tell them? (Q3)
   • What do you want teachers to know about your involvement in your child’s success in school? (Q3)

J. What is one thing you wish educators in your child’s school knew about you and your children? (Q2, Q3)
   • What else do you think is important for educators to know when supporting Iraqi refugee families? (Q3)
INTERVIEW # 2: *(Actual questions may vary depending on 1st interview and focus group)*

i. Would you please share the items in your memory box and tell me what they mean for you in terms of parent engagement? (Q1, Q2, Q3)
   - What I something you would have put in your memory box, but couldn’t? (Q2)
   - What is a memory that you would hope to include in your future? (Q2)

ii. During our last interview, you mentioned that interaction with your child’s teacher is important. Can you tell me more about what exactly these interactions look like or tell me more about what you mean by your description of the conference your child’s teacher as good? (Q3)

iii. What experiences have you had in your life that have helped you to better support your child? (Q2)

iv. What are your hopes and dreams for your child’s future? (Q2)

*Note: Many interview questions being utilized within this study were inspired by: Good, M. E. (2010). *Meaningful parental involvement: A view through the lens of six migrant parents*. Saarbrucken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing. *Questions inspired from Dr. Good’s dissertation are being used with her permission.*
APPENDIX F

ARABIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
توضيح سياق تجارب مشترك أولياء الأمور
بناء شراكات ناجحة مع الأمهات التي قدمن إلى الولايات المتحدة
كلاجات في بداية الأمر

طالبة في مرحلة الدكتوراة والقيادة التربوية والدراسات المتعلقة بالسياسات, Heather Kholif
 هاتف:60760-237 (970)
 khol8421@bears.unco.edu

عينة من أسئلة المقابلة

هذه الأسئلة هي مجرد عينة، وقد لا تتضمن قائمة شاملة من الأسئلة التي يمكن طرحها أثناء المقابلة.

المقابلة الأولى

1- هل أخبرتي قليلا عن عائلتك و عن الرحلة التي قمت بها، كيف إنتهى بكي المطاف إلي هنا؟
   ما مدة إقامتك هنا في هذه المدينة أو الولايات المتحدة عموما؟
   ابن كان مكان إقامتك قبل الحضور إلي هنا؟
   ماهو أكبر شيء يعجبك هنا؟ ما هي الصعوبات التي تواجهك هنا؟

2- قبل الإنتقال و المعيشة هنا أود أن أخبرك عن بعض الذكريات و الخبرات التعليمية التي تذكرينها خلال المراحل الدراسية؟
   كيف كان عمرك عندما أتممت دراستك؟
   ما البقاء الذي كنت تعيشين فيه خلال مراحل الدراسة؟
   ماهي التوقعات التي توقعها والديك لك؟
   ماهي وسائل الدعم التي قدمها لك والديك خلال المراحل التعليمية؟

3- أخبرتي قليلا عن خبرات طفلك خلال حضوره المدرسة هنا
   هل أطفالك كانوا ملتزمين بمدرسة أخرى قبل المدرسة الحالية؟
   كم عمر طفلك ملتزم بالمدرسة و في أي فصل دراسي حاليا؟
   من وجهة نظرك ما هو الشيء المفضل في هذه المدرسة لدي طفلك؟
   حينما تسمعين "إنجاز أولياء الأمور" ماذا تعني لك هذه الجملة؟
   ما هو تعريف إنجاز أولياء الأمور من وجهة نظرك؟
   كيف تبدو علاقة الشراكة الناجحة بين المدرسة و المنزل؟
   أيين تقومين في الغالب بدعم طفلك (المدرسة أو المنزل)؟

4- ما هو دورك في عملية دعم عملية طفلك التعليمية؟
   ما هو دور المدرسة أو الإدارة في وجهة نظرك؟
   كيف كانت تجربتك خلال عملية تسجيل وافق طفلك بالمدرسة هنا في الولايات المتحدة؟
   ماذا كان لديك خلال عملية التسجيل؟
   ماذا يمكن تغييره من شأنه يفيد لك مزيد من الدعم؟

5- هل يمكن أن تخبرني عن أي عوائق واجهتك كأحد الوالدين داخل النظام التعليمي في الولايات المتحدة؟
ماذا تعتقدين ما هو سبب هذا العائق؟
* هل تغلبت على هذا الحاجز؟ إذا كان الأمر كذلك، كيف تغلبت على الحاجز؟
* هل هناك أي عوائق لم تتمكن من التغلب عليها؟

8- فكر في وقت ساعدت فيه أحد أطفالك في العمل المدرسي. أخبرني عن طفلك وكيف ساعدت.
9- ما هو السهل وما هو الصعب بالنسبة لك في مساعدة طفلك على النجاح في المدرسة؟
10- إذا كنت لديك أسئلة أو مخاوف حول كيفية عمل طفلك في المدرسة، من الذي تتجه إليه للحصول على المساعدة؟
11- هل أنت مشترك حاليا في النشاط المدرسي؟ إذا كان الأمر كذلك، ما هي الطرق؟ إذا لم يكن كذلك، لماذا؟
* ما الذي من شأنه أن يشجعك أو يدفعك من أجل المشاركة بشكل أكبر في النشاط المدرسي؟
12- ما هي توقعاتك لتعليم طفلك؟
المقابلة الجماعية وقد تختلف الأسئلة الفعلية بناءً على المقابلة الأولى)

أ- ماذا تعني مشاركة الوالدين أو إندماج الوالدين لك؟
ب- استرجع ذاكرة خلال مشاركتك في مراحل تعليم طفلك، أخبرني ما هي أكثر هذه الذكريات متعة؟
ت- ما الذي تعتقد أنه دورك في دعم تعليم طلك؟
ج- ما هي بعض الأشياء التي تقوم بها في المنزل لدعم طلك؟

ح- ما هي بعض الأشياء التي تقدمها المدارس، أو ينبغي أن تقدمها، لتعزيز العلاقات بين الآباء والمعلمين؟ ما هو الشيء الذي تريد أن يظلوا من فعلها؟
خ- ما هي بعض التحديات الفردية التي تواجهها عائلات اللاجئين العراقيين داخل النظام التعليمي في الولايات المتحدة؟
د- ما هي الطرق التي تعتقد أن ثقافتك قد تؤثر على كيفية دعم طلك للمدرسة؟
* كيف يمكن للمعلمين تلبية احتياجات بشكل أفضل بطريقة تحتترم ثقافتك؟
ذ- إذا كنت تستطيع تغيير شيء واحد لتحسين تجربة طلك التعليمية، ما الذي سوف تتغير؟
ر- لنفترض أنك قد تقدم للمعلمين نصيحة واحدة حول كيفية تقديم أفضل دعم لك ولطلك، فماذا ستقول لهم؟
* ما الذي تريد أن يعرفه المعلمون حول مشاركتك في نجاح طلك في المدرسة؟
ز- ما هو الشيء الذي تريد أن يعلمه المعلمون في مدرسة طلك عنك وأطفالك؟
* ما الذي تعتقد أنه من المهم أن يعرفه المعلمون عند دعم عائلات اللاجئين العراقيين؟
المقابلة 2 (قد تختلف الأسئلة الفعلية بناءً على المقابلة الأولى)

س.- هل من الممكن مشاركة العناصر المودودة في صندوق الذاكرة الخاصة بك وقل لي ما تعنيه بالنسبة لك من حيث مشاركة الوالدين؟

ما إذا كان هناك شيء كنت تود وضعه في صندوق الذاكرة الخاصة بك، لكنك لم تستطيعي؟

ما هي الذكري التي كنت تأمل أن تكون في مستقبلك؟

ش.- خلال المقابلة الأخيرة، ذكرتم أن التفاعل مع مدرس طفلك هو في غاية الأهمية. هل يمكن أن تخبرني المزيد حول ما تبدو بالضبط مثل هذه التفاعلات أو قل لي أكثر حول ما تعنيها وصفك للاجتماع مع معلم طفلك بأنها جيدة؟

ص.- ما هي التجربة التي حصلت عليها في حياتك والتي ساعدتك على دعم طفلك بشكل أفضل؟

ض.- ما هي أمالك وأحلامك لمستقبل طفلك؟
APPENDIX G

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER
DATE: September 22, 2017

TO: Heather Kholf
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1113250-2] CONTEXTUALIZING EXPERIENCES OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT: BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS WITH IRAQI REFUGEE MOTHERS IN THE U.S.

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 22, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE: September 22, 2018
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of September 22, 2018.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.