A SNAPSHOT OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL VIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS OF TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF: MIDDLE EASTERN STUDENTS WITHIN AN AUSTRALIAN MARITIME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an investigation that was conducted in order to contribute to the knowledge of factors influencing cross-cultural discourse between students from the Middle East and staff within the Australian Maritime Education and Training (MET) environment. The literature argues convincingly that MET teachers should develop skills relating to cross-cultural interaction in response to the global nature of this sector of the maritime industry. It also suggests that teachers should attempt to discover their prejudices, so that they can become better equipped to spot the learners who are likely to provoke strong responses. The approach adopted for this study is qualitative in nature, and is considered to be a small case study which fits the unique context of an Australian MET institution.

The data sought related to views and perceptions held by the staff with respect to MET students from the Middle East region. The population sampled for this study consisted of 35 staff members working in an Australian MET institution. This sample comprised general support staff and lecturers. The survey instrument consisted of a voluntary written survey comprising 33 Likert scale items and four open ended items. Data obtained from the Likert scale items was coded and processed using SPSS. Responses to these items were subjected to a basic descriptive statistical analysis and are reported in terms of frequency counts. The data obtained from the open ended items was processed by classifying words or phrases representing the survey participants’ perceptions of Middle Eastern students into negative or positive traits and counting the frequencies of these responses. Analysis of the data clearly shows evidence of cross-cultural influences on the learning discourse. The study found evidence of racial stereotyping in staff relating to gender as well as uncertainty about how well this student group was fitting into the Australian MET environment. Middle Eastern students were reported as showing a great deal of respect to the staff involved in the survey in most instances but are noted as demonstrating a pattern of poor punctuality. There is also evidence in the form of staff observations of tensions within the classroom between non-Middle Eastern and Middle East students as well as evidence indicating that a proportion of Middle Eastern students are adversely affected by the prospect of losing face by seeking assistance when they are experiencing difficulties in class. A small proportion of the staff sample appeared to have low expectations of Middle Eastern student performance, but the majority of staff did not express this view. This case study also found that some students were withdrawing from the learning process. The survey data provides some possible solutions to the issues raised above. These are focused on cross-cultural awareness training for staff, Middle Eastern students and for non-Middle Eastern students combined with activities designed to encourage mixing and getting to know the ‘other’.

Keywords: Cross-cultural, discourse, maritime, education
1. INTRODUCTION
The commercial nature and increasing technical complexity of the international merchant navy fleet has resulted in ship owners choosing their personnel very carefully. The companies must have officers with appropriate personal attributes and with relevant education and training. The global nature of maritime education and training (MET) provides ship owners with a range of institutions to choose from. As a result, a company is able successfully train their officers in many countries. However, as English is used in the merchant fleet, some shipping companies located in the Middle East region choose to send their trainee officers to institutions in countries such as Australia, where all MET is conducted in the English language. While this approach has the advantage of immersing the trainee officers in the English language, it also immerses them in a new discourse environment which can be challenging for students and staff.

2. RATIONALE
This study has been conducted in an attempt to contribute to the knowledge of factors which influence cross-cultural discourse within the MET environment. Teo (2006) argues strongly that MET teachers should develop skills relating to cross-cultural interaction in response to the global nature of this sector of the maritime industry. Teo’s suggested response to this circumstance is for teachers to discover their prejudices so that they can become better equipped to spot the learners who are likely to provoke strong responses. Once this has occurred, appropriate teaching strategies can be employed. According to (Mortiboys, 2005) “To assume a set of characteristics based on one factor means that you will be less able to assess accurately who that person is.” (p.111). The Western media may be one such ‘factor’. The reporting by the Western media of recent world politics involving the Israeli/Arab tensions, wars in Lebanon and Iraq, together with reporting of terrorism associated with Arab groups has been prolific. Reports appear on radio and television on a daily basis. The constant stream of negative news relating to Arabs and Muslims would appear to have the potential to influence the way Westerners think about people from the Middle East. This view has been supported by the literature which suggests that conflation can lead to stereotypical representations of Arabs, Muslims and terrorism as a homogeneous threat to Westerners (Schwartz, 2002; Mansouri & Trembath, 2005; David & Ayouby 2005; Clyne 2004; Wingfield & Karaman, 1995). Kostoulas-Makrakis (2005) goes further with his views stating that “dangerous misunderstanding and stereotypical perceptions have been ascribed to the Arab world and Arabs, especially after 9/11.” (p.501). If this is in fact the case, research involving MET institutions which have Arab students may help to identify whether staff involved in the delivery of MET with Arab students are influenced by racial stereotyping. Taylor (1987) states that “Stereotyping due to generalizing may be inevitable among those who lack frequent contact with another culture” (p.1). Given that the MET staff in this study have had contact with students from ‘another culture’, this study may help to determine whether the experience of Middle Eastern students gained by staff has positively influenced their views, in contrast to stereotypical views that can be generated by fear of the unknown, the ‘other’ which has been highly reported in the media.

3. RESEARCH APPROACH
The approach adopted for this study is qualitative in nature, and is considered to be a small case study which fits the unique context of an Australian MET institution. It is anticipated that the findings arising from this approach may provide valuable insights into discourse within the institution investigated (Gillham, 2000) and assist in the improvement of socio-cultural interaction within the Australian MET environment. It is however acknowledged that these may not be applicable in other educational contexts.

3.1. The Research Question
The aim of this investigation is to gather data that will assist in addressing the following questions:

- What cultural assumptions are held by staff at an Australian MET institution about Middle Eastern students?
- What observations have been made by staff in an Australian MET institution relating to Middle Eastern students?

3.2. Data Gathering Instruments
A written survey was chosen as the data gathering instrument for this study. This was selected in preference to interviews due to the need to obtain information from up to 45 research participants. It is acknowledged that a semi-structured or open ended interview would have potentially produced richer data. However, the sensitive
nature of the topic being investigated was also a factor considered in the choice of data gathering instrument for this study. Qualitative research into cross-cultural issues requires sensitivity on the part of the researcher if frank and truthful answers to the research question are to be obtained (Clyne, 2004, p. 1.). Interview responses could have been affected by concerns of a lack of anonymity, fear of being labeled a racist or of retribution from the institution. These concerns may have resulted in reserved responses (Sikes, 2000; Taft, 1977). The relationship between the researcher, staff and students was also considered in the data gathering process. It is also possible that teaching staff who are directly supervised by the researcher, may be reluctant to participate in an interview that had the potential to ‘make them look bad’ in the eyes of their supervisor.

An open ended written survey was initially considered for this study. It was based on the methodology adopted by Kostoulas-Makrakis (2005) in a study examining the perceptions of Emirati pre-service teachers of European culture. The context of this study was similar to this study in that it was attempting to describe the perceptions, assumptions and stereotypical beliefs of the Arab participants and it was believed this approach would be appropriate for the MET study. A pilot study was conducted in order to determine the degree of openness of the survey question and the quality of data provided in the responses. The participants included four staff who had experienced significant interaction with students from the Middle East. The responses received from the pilot survey were very broad in scope and would present significant challenges in coding and classification in a manner that would be consistent with reporting in the detail anticipated for the study.

As a result, the survey instrument developed consists of 33 Likert scale items and four directed open ended question items. The survey questions were formulated on the basis of data previously collected from students from written surveys and from semi-structured interviews (Boyle 2006; Boyle & Lé 2006). This approach was adopted in order to reduce the effect of research bias affecting the choice of survey items. The survey comprised seven items relating to participant background, six items relating to participant actions and twenty items relating to views and attitudes relating to the Middle Eastern people and students. An opportunity was provided for participants to provide more open responses relating to positive/negative traits, suggestions for improving the learning experience of the Middle Eastern student as well as for any other comments that relate to this area.

3.3. Sampling
The population sampled for this study consisted of 45 staff members working in an Australian MET institution. This sample comprised general and support staff and teaching staff. All of the participants within the sample had contact with students from the Arabian Gulf region as a normal part of their activities within the institution surveyed. The survey was administered on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

3.4. Analysis
The data obtained from the Likert scale items in the survey was coded and processed using SPSS. Responses to these items were subjected to a basic descriptive statistical analysis and are reported in terms of frequency counts. Descriptive statistics have been reported in terms of proportions and percentages in this instance. The sample size for this study should be large enough to ensure that the data is not statistically misrepresented. The items used in the Likert scale section of the survey were grouped into broad themes. These included themes relating to staff opinions, staff observations, and staff practices. The data obtained from the open ended items was processed using a similar methodology used by Kostoulas-Marrikas (2005). This involved identifying words or phrases representing the respondent’s perceptions of Middle Eastern students, classifying these into positive or negative traits and counting the frequencies of these responses. Further categories were assigned to the data so that it could be analyzed further and inferences drawn. Once categorized, the statements were analyzed in order to determine whether they could be attributed to observation and experience or of stereotypical views.

3.5. Limitations
According to Mortiboy (2005) “The swift reaction of most teachers when asked if they have any prejudices towards others would be to say that the treat all equally” (p.111). This reaction may be attributed to a teacher deliberately concealing his or her true feelings about the issue due to fear of being labeled as someone who is not ‘politically correct’. It may also be the result of ignorance. The teachers concerned may not be aware that they do carry prejudices which cause them to treat some learners differently to others. The sensitive nature of this study may have resulted in responses influenced by concerns about being identified as a racist, socio-culturally incompetent and wanting to be represented in the study as being a politically correct practitioner. This influence may have been mitigated by the assurances of anonymity and by the explanation of the rationale for the study that
was provided to each participant. Another limitation of this survey is related to classifying responses as being either based on observational experience or as assumptions. In most instances, the wording of written responses to open ended questions provided a clear indication of this. Survey items relating to experience and practice are unambiguous in their interpretation. However, the remainder of the Likert scale items relate to attitudes. It would be inappropriate to attempt to classify these responses as experiential or as views and this has not been attempted.

The views that are expressed by the study participants make no distinction between people from different countries or between the levels of study being undertaken by Middle Eastern students. Taylor (1987) warns that “Cultural awareness varies among individuals” (p. 4). We as educators need to avoid the trap of stereotyping a culture as “all cultures have internal variations” and are “continually evolving” (ibid). The Arab students attending the MET institution involved in the study are from the Arabian Gulf States of the United Arab Emirates and Oman. As a result, it is possible that there may be cultural differences within the student population associated with this case study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Forty five surveys were distributed within the institution involved in the study. The sample chosen for this study consisted of teaching staff and general staff who would normally have some exposure to Middle Eastern students. A total of 35 surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 77%; 20 from teachers (57%) and 15 from general staff (43%).

4.1. Staff Background Data
The age of staff ranged from under 35 years (11%) to between 61-65 years (3%). The majority of staff ages (67%) were distributed across the range of 41-55 years of age. 15 participants (43%) stated they were bilingual. The gender distribution of the participants was 40% female and 60% male. Experience working within the MET environment collectively equated to 329 years, ranging between 1 to 26 years with a mean of 9.4 years, a median of 8 years and a mode of 2 years.

4.2. Do Arab Students Fit in to the MET Discourse?
One aspect of a Middle Eastern student’s learning experience is the ease in which he or she is able to fit in to the Australian MET discourse. Taft (1977) states that “When an individual finds himself in an unfamiliar cultural environment, where his previous learning is inadequate for coping, he may suffer some degree of emotional disturbance, a condition often referred to as culture shock;” (p.139). A significant proportion of this survey was aimed at collecting data that related to this learning experience from the point of view of staff. Almost one third (29%) of participants expressed the view that Middle Eastern students fit well into the Australian learning environment. Two participants (6%) did not believe this to be the case and two thirds (66%) of the participants were not sure. In addition, (60%) of participants expressed the view that foreign students should fit in with Australian cultural values. The following statements also reflect this sentiment:

“Explain to them that they should try & fit in within Australian culture not the other way round.”

“I feel sometimes that in the name of political correctness we as lecturers are expected to pander to the cultural and ethnic idiosyncrasies of foreign students. I believe this to be a mistake: it is at best, insincere, at worst, weak but in any case, unprincipled. We must be careful to be tolerant without betraying our own values. Make no mistake: students will recognise honesty and strength of conviction.”

4.3. Views on Cultural Differences and Values
Mortiboys (2005) holds the view that prejudices held by teachers about their students can lead to “unhelpful interactions” (p.112) that adversely affect the learning discourse. If this is the case, it is possible that Australian MET institutions are failing to adequately provide for Middle Eastern students’ education in a similar way as was reported by (Holmes, 1992). In this instance, a student groups’ learning was disadvantaged because they had been labeled as “learning disabled” due to having a vernacular dialect (p.358). In situations like this, students can begin to doubt their teacher’s commitment to the learning process because “… teachers make little attempt to understand them culturally.” (Mansouri & Trembath, 2005, p.525). The survey showed that the majority of staff believed that cultural awareness is important for improving the learning experience for Middle Eastern students. Slightly more than three quarters (77%) of the survey participants agreed that an awareness of cultural differences by staff can improve the learning outcome for Middle Eastern students, 9% disagreed with this and 14% were not
sure. There was a slight reduction in support for staff being required to undertake cross-cultural training. In this case, almost two thirds (62%) of the sample agreed that staff in a MET institution should undertake training in cross-cultural awareness, 23% disagreed with this and 15% were unsure. There were also five comments made by respondents supporting such training. The following comments summed up the sentiments expressed:

“As an institution we need to do far more to improve our understanding of multicultural issues.”

“Provide staff with training in cultural standards associated with different countries so we can understand them a little more and are less likely to offend them by not understanding their culture.”

Although a high proportion of staff support such training, this sentiment conflicts with the response to the survey item ‘I seek information about Arab culture’. The response to this item indicated that 46% have sought this type of information ‘sometimes’ and the remainder have done so either ‘rarely’ or ‘never’. Looked at as a separate group, 55% of teachers stated that they sought such information sometimes, 40% rarely and 5% never. This may be due to staff supporting a management initiated awareness program over the reality of self initiated research into this area, which has the potential to be over shadowed by other work related demands and activities in a busy environment.

A question that logically follows after a staff member has developed cross-cultural awareness is to what extent should teaching practices be modified in light of the new awareness? Almost two thirds of staff (60%) expressed the view that teachers should modify their teaching style to take cultural differences into account, one quarter (26%) disagreed and 14% were not sure. The following statements were also made relating to this theme:

“Speak in plain English terms Don’t use Australian Slang.”

“Teachers & trainers with a sound understanding of adult learning principles would probably argue that cultural differences are less relevant than learning differences. Cultural background should have little to do with the acquisition of new competence. Rather, the students capacity to use the language of the learning environment and the teacher’s desire to generate interest in authentic learning situations would underpin student success or otherwise.”

The survey respondents also indicated that Middle Eastern students should become participants in the development of cross-cultural awareness. Only 3% of the sample agreed that these students have a good understanding of Australian cultural values. 34% disagreed with this and 60% indicated that they were not sure. A possible solution to this circumstance would be to increase the cross-cultural awareness of Middle Eastern students. This view was supported by just over three quarters of respondents (77%). However, 14 % disagreed with this and 9% were not sure. The following comments were also provided by respondents:

“Run “pre course” programs for the students making them aware of the issues and their obligations.”

“Arab students and any other cultures should participate in cross cultural awareness. Make them aware of Australian cultural nuances particularly Australian humor.”

“Should spend some time first to adjust to the culture and disciplinary routine of a teaching institution.”

4.4. Cross-cultural Tension in the Classroom

The following comments from survey respondents indicate that tensions have been observed within the MET institution surveyed.

“I suspect some anti-Arab sentiment is present amongst Australian students”

“Sometimes the local students tend to believe that the Arab students get preferential treatment because of their perceived higher financial status.”

In total, 43% of the staff participating in this survey reported becoming aware of tensions between Middle Eastern and other students. This observation was slightly more prevalent in teaching staff where almost half (47%) reported being aware of these tensions.
The source of the observed tensions on campus may be due to conflation of the Arab/Muslim/Terrorist associated with media reporting. The role of the media in shaping views was explored using the statement ‘Arabs are portrayed positively by the media’ Just over half (54%) of staff disagreed with this, 26% were not sure and 17% agreed with this statement. Middle Eastern students have, in the past, been referred to as terrorists within the MET environment (Boyle, 2006). Evidence of such thinking was found in the following survey response:

“Arrogant (males), possessive (males), hot headed, un-accepting of other religions, involved in terrorism...Misinterpreting the koran (sic.) to suit their own interests.”

This view was not typical of the responses received. A small proportion of staff (11%) assumed that an Arab is a Muslim. Almost half (48%) disagreed with this and one third (34%) were not sure. 17% of the respondents agreed with the statement ‘Australians fear Arabs’, just over half (54%) disagreed with this view while a quarter (26%) were not sure. In addition, seven respondents made comments relating to addressing potential cross-cultural tension in the classroom:

“Training of Australian students in cultural awareness”.
“Awareness training on all cultures for staff & also other students”
“More cultural awareness training to be given to non-Arab students”.
“Greater integration with non-Arab students – Avoid grouping them together.”
“More team building exercises.”
“Attempt to involve the Arab student in a discussion in a one to one or small group situation.”
“Encourage more interaction/social gathering etc”

4.5. Stereotyping

According to the literature on cross-cultural interaction, racial stereotyping is likely to exist to some extent in all individuals from a different culture. This is an area that staff in teaching institutions need to be cognizant of so that a reflective approach can be adopted to minimize the effect of such views (Merryfield, 2002; Mortiboys, 2005). Survey items relating to stereotyping included the following areas:

4.5.1. Gender

The views expressed by participants were the strongest indication of stereotyping from the survey. Almost two thirds of survey participants (63%) agreed with the statement that Arab men do not like being told what to do by females. 29% were not sure and 9% disagreed. This item also elicited the following statements in response to an open ended item relating to negative traits associated with Arabs:

“Disrespect or treatment of women as their lesser part”
“Attitudes towards women”
“Males: arrogant, treat women with contempt”
“Hypocritical & unfair (males) regarding pre marital sex and adultery”

It was unclear from the survey whether these responses stemmed from experience, assumption or belief.

4.5.2. Resentment and Offense

Almost two thirds of the sample (63%) indicated that were not sure whether Arab students resented having to come to a Western country to learn. 37% expressed the view that Arab students did not resent having to come to a Western country to learn. The high percentage of survey participants who indicated that they were unsure about this item indicates this may be an issue that needs to be addressed. Data obtained from Middle Eastern students interviewed by Boyle (2006) indicated that they felt no resentment at having to come to an Australian MET institution to study with the response; “We haven’t been forced, we chose” (p.5) summing up this sentiment.

4.6. Learning Performance Expectations

Minton (1997) writing about general classroom practice, advocates the development of the ability to discern what is really occurring within a class and to avoid the acceptance of teacher and student stereotypes which can negatively influence teaching and learning strategies employed by teachers. Almost half of the surveyed staff (49%) agreed with the statement ‘Arab students perform academically as well as non-Arab students’. However,
40% were not sure and 11% disagreed with this statement. Additionally, 14% of staff agreed with the statement that ‘ESL (English as second language) students will obtain poorer results than the rest of the class’, 29% were not sure and 57% disagreed with this statement. From this data, it appears that learning expectations are generally positive. However, there may be a risk that the poor performance expectation identified may adversely influence Middle Eastern student outcomes in some cases.

4.7. Perceptions of Arab Behaviour
Almost two thirds of the staff surveyed 60% agreed with the statement ‘Arab students show respect to staff’. Almost one quarter (23%) disagreed with this statement and 17% were not sure. The following written statements relating to ‘positive traits associated with Arabs’ were also provided by respondents:

“Polite & well mannered.”
“Polite manners”.
“Always polite”.
“Polite, attentive, generally well mannered”.
“Well mannered, polite, warm to individuals who take time to talk to them, ask how their course is progressing, if they are having a good time at AMC”.
“Those I have met are much more courteous to lecturing staff than Australians of non-Arab descent.”
“Respect to others”.
“Respectful to teachers”.
“Generally respectful towards their teacher”
“Similar to other students but more respectful than Australians”
“Respectful willing to learn”.
“Listen to proffered advice & take onboard”.
“Work hard- want to achieve best outcomes for themselves”
“Sober”
“Most have a good sense of humor”.
“Never play pranks or political jokes on fellow students”.
“Never disturb the class/group”.

These statements outweighed the following negative comments:

“usually very abrupt and quite rude, do not know when to wait their turn”
“Lack of respect in class talking and being disruptive”.

Another behavioural issue investigated in this study related to punctuality. This has been identified as an issue that has the potential to cause tension in the classroom (Boyle, 2006). The survey results also appear to show evidence of problems with punctuality with some Middle Eastern students. Just over one third of staff (35%) disagreed with the statement that ‘Punctuality is important for Arab students’. Almost half 46% were unsure and 20% agreed with this statement. In addition, five staff provided comments relating to students lack of punctuality. One respondent indicated a more positive experience stating; “Generally more punctual than non-Arabs.”

4.8. Face
Almost one quarter (24%) of the respondents agreed that it is easy to cause an Arab student to lose face. A similar proportion (26%) disagreed with this view and 50% were unsure about this. This result is probably a significant one, in terms of the learning process. Loss of face has been identified as an important issue affecting discourse with Arabs (Boyle, 2006; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Williams, 1998). When staff are unaware that this is an important issue for Arab students, any resulting offense may lead to withdrawal from the learning process. The following survey response appears to indicate that there is some recognition of the link between loss of face and reluctance to seek assistance from staff when needed:

“...seem to be less willing to come forward – clarification – maybe a combination of not losing face and gender. A reluctance to participate actively in class.”
4.9. Withdrawal and Lack of Engagement
Anecdotal evidence prior to conducting this study indicated that Middle Eastern students were generally reluctant to ask questions or seek assistance after class if they were experiencing difficulties with their learning. The survey responses indicated that 40% of the staff surveyed agreed that ‘Arab students are reluctant to seek help when they need it’, one quarter (23%) disagreed with this statement and 37% were not sure. A statement ‘Arab students will seek clarification if they do not understand something’ received a similar response: 31% of staff agreed with the statement, 34% staff disagreed and 34% staff were unsure. The following comments from respondents provide some evidence that some Arab students have not engaged fully with the learning process and showing signs of withdrawal for at least a part of their study program:

“Tend to keep too much to themselves”
“Little interest in "integration" with their class mates”
“Do not mix socially on campus with non Arabs and tend to work/study in Arabic Groups”
“Pack mentality”
“Will be or show extra enthusiasm towards a ‘Muslim’ or other Arab men”
“Do not ask enough questions in class.”
“They do not appear to be interested in the learning experience”
“Seem to be less willing to come forward – clarification- maybe a combination of not losing face and gender.”
“A reluctance to participate actively in class”.
“Some are not too serious about their studies”
“Not sure. They do not appear to be interested in the learning experience, so improving it may be difficult.”

Two statements were made indicating that this observation did not apply to all Arab students.

“Majority seek advice on subject matter if not clear to them”.
“Will ask questions in class and come and see me.”

4.10. Analysis Of Comments Regarding Positive And Negative Traits Of Arabs.

Table 1 provides a summary of the traits identified from the responses received. These have been classified into the following four categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Arab Trait Reported</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>From Teachers</th>
<th>From Staff</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>6 negative 0 positive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL Issues</td>
<td>2 negative 0 positive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Classroom Behaviour</td>
<td>12 negative 7 positive</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Traits</td>
<td>14 negative 15 positive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1 contains a list of the comments relating to positive and negative traits.

These comments, like the responses to the other sections of the survey confirms that there is a wide range of views and experiences within the sample of staff who volunteered to take part in this study. Knowing that there are differences of opinion creates the opportunity for discussion and for strategies to be developed that will improve the discourse between MET staff and students from Middle Eastern countries.

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5. CONCLUSION
The purpose of this case study has been to attempt to obtain a ‘snap shot’ of the views and perceptions of staff members working with Middle Eastern students in the context of an Australian MET institution. The data collected from the participants in the case study clearly shows evidence of cross-cultural influences on the learning discourse. Middle Eastern students have been reported as showing a great deal of respect to the staff involved in the survey in most instances but are noted as demonstrating a pattern of poor punctuality. There is clear evidence in the form of staff observations of tensions within the classroom between non-Middle Eastern and Middle Eastern students. There is also evidence indicating that a proportion of Middle Eastern students are adversely affected by the prospect of losing face by seeking assistance when they are experiencing difficulties in class. A small proportion of the staff sampled appeared to have low expectations of Middle Eastern student performance, but the majority of staff did not express this view. These factors combined with comments indicating that a number of Middle Eastern students are withdrawing from the learning process should be cause for concern. The survey data provides some possible solutions to the issues raised above. These are focused on cross-cultural awareness training for staff, Middle Eastern students and for other students combined with activities designed to encourage mixing and getting to know the ‘other’. If these activities are undertaken, there may be a change in the extent of stereotypical views that were expressed in the survey response, especially those relating to gender and of the Arab as a person to be feared. This could result in a learning environment where the discourse has a minimum of cross-cultural incompetence (Kostoulas-Markrikas, 2005, Merryfield, 2002). It is hoped that this case study has gone some way towards achieving this goal.

5.1. Further Investigation?
There are at least two areas related to this study that appear to warrant further investigation. The first would be a comparative study involving a sample from a MET institution which has no experience with Middle Eastern students. This would potentially identify any differences in responses that were stereotypical rather than based on experience and observation of students. The second area would be an investigation into why a large number of respondents indicated they were ‘not sure’ about many of the survey statements. Conducting a focus group may be an appropriate approach to this issue.

6. REFERENCES

**Appendix 1**

Comments in italics were from support staff. Comments in normal font were from teaching staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Trait Responses</th>
<th>Negative Trait Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Traits</strong></td>
<td><strong>General Traits</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually very neat in appearance.</td>
<td>Cannot think of any. (positive traits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean and tidy</td>
<td>Attitudes towards women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usual respect teachers</td>
<td>Males: arrogant, treat women with contempt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sober</td>
<td>Arrogant (males)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most have a good sense of humor.</td>
<td>Possessive (males)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite &amp; well mannered</td>
<td>Hot-headed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always polite</td>
<td>Un-accepting of other religions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite, attentive, generally well mannered.</td>
<td>Involved in terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well mannered, polite, warm to individuals who take time to talk to them, ask how their course is progressing, if they are having a good time at AMC. Those I have met are much more courteous to lecturing staff than Australians of non-Arab descent.</td>
<td>Misinterpreting the Koran to suit their own interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect to others.</td>
<td>Unusually very abrupt and quite rude, do not know when to wait their turn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful towards teachers.</td>
<td>High power distance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally respectful towards their teacher Similar to other students but more respectful than Australians</td>
<td>Disrespect or treatment of women as their lesser part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>Very strong/inflexible dietary regimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observed Classroom Behaviour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observed Classroom Behaviour</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to learn</td>
<td>Do not ask enough questions in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never play pranks or political jokes on fellow students.</td>
<td>They do not appear to be interested in the learning experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never disturb the class/group.</td>
<td>Seem to be less willing to come forward – clarification- maybe a combination of not losing face and gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority seek advice on subject matter if not clear to them.</td>
<td>A reluctance to participate actively in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will ask questions in class and come and see me Listen to proffered advice &amp; take onboard.</td>
<td>Some are not too serious about their studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are keen to learn at the higher level They have a higher than average IQ.</td>
<td>Being results focused– wanting to know just what will be in the exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work hard- want to achieve best outcomes for themselves</td>
<td>Lack of respect in class talking and being disruptive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Appear conscientious</em></td>
<td>Punctuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally more punctual than non-Arabs</td>
<td>Punctuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They behave the same way as any other student.</td>
<td>Lack of punctuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punctuality is poor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| **Social Interaction** | Tend to keep too much to themselves.  
Little interest in “integration” with their class mates.  
Do not mix socially on campus with non-Arabs and  
tend to work/study in Arabic groups.  
Pack mentality.  
Will show extra enthusiasm towards a ‘muslim’ or  
other Arab men. |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **ESL Issues** | Or could simply be that don’t always understand  
spoken word so well.  
*Poor English skills- sometimes communicating is  
difficult and they appear to get frustrated easily.* |
| **Other opinions** | Driving skills in relation to road safety traveling  
between campuses.  
They do not have a maritime tradition and have  
difficulty in grasping maritime training at the early  
stages. |
| **Other Responses** | They bring lots of money into the AMC and are a potential area of great potential capital growth for the  
institution.  
The possibility that they will cause AMC staff to open their horizons.(positive trait response).  
Driving skills in relation to road safety traveling between campuses.  
They do not have a maritime tradition and have difficulty in grasping maritime training at the early stages. |