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Lost in Transition from Adolescent to Global Citizen

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Introduction

Ideas about international students who have difficulty making the transition from high school to university have been percolating away in the back of my mind for some years now, but with no action component.

So I want to thank Hedley Reberger from the University of Adelaide for researching and writing about international students who did well in high school or foundation programs but who then had difficulty with the transition to study at university in South Australia. This represents a growing interest, which I share, in the cohort of students who use the 'pathways' of high school and foundation years to enter Australian universities.

Borrowing from one of his power point slides (Reberger: 'Big Problem, Nothing Working', 2004), Hedley summarised this group's own identification of the transition to study problems as:

- As a result of attending high school here, they think they know all about the Australian education system, and therefore underestimate needing different strategies for success in university
- They already have a network of friends and so have more distractions.

His paper inspired me because every semester for 15 years, I have been seeing young international students who had usually failed all of their subjects in their first and often second, sometimes their third semesters. I started to very quickly recognize them as students who had done one or more years of high school in Australia. Their ages were about 20 to 21, they usually spoke colloquial English and, despite seeing what looked like young adults in front of me, they often seemed much younger. They seemed a bit lost and were usually scared of:

- failing and going 'home'
- being at university
- studying some courses in English
- returning to life back in home countries
- their parents

My two professional social work experiences haven't often overlapped. One job was as a new graduate working for over five years in the Queensland State Government Department of Children's Services in the area of foster care and adoption of older children. My work for the past fifteen years has been as an International Student Adviser at the University of Queensland.

When seeing these young international students, however, my substitute family work started to resonate and I thought there were additional dimensions to this picture. I decided to review what I had learned in social work 'child and family' studies about child development and the factors that affected the smooth progression from one stage of development to another. The expressed fear of their parents also made me examine parenting styles and the part they played in a younger student's life. As I helped myself to better understand what I was seeing, I thought it could be useful to share this 'back to basics' material with colleagues.

So the aims of this paper are to:

1. Review the developmental stages of young people from mid to late adolescence.
2. Examine the effect on 'normal' development when a person in their mid adolescent years moves from their family and country to Australia.
3. Look at basic cultural differences between a mainly collectivist culture (as in many Asian countries) and the broadly more individualist Australian culture and how this may affect the adaptation of adolescents from collectivist cultures to life in Australia.
4. Consider parenting styles as they may affect how our younger international students manage in Australia.

I suspected that the relationship with parents was highly significant. We all see students who are young and who fail, but it seemed to me that those who felt they could talk over their predicament with their parents overseas seemed to be more confident about resolving the experience of failing at university. It seemed that the students who were most distressed felt they did not have a sympathetic parent to talk to.

Because this young group of students are seen not just by International Student Advisers, but are known to other counsellors in my service, there has been benefit in sharing ideas about how best to help these students.

Therefore, the final part of this presentation will be for us to discuss what we as counsellors can do to help the students who may be 'Lost in Transition from Adolescent to Global Citizen'.

Please note that this is a practice based paper. I studied textbooks and general parenting guides, all of which used a variety of terms for this age group: 'adolescent', 'young person' 'child' 'teenager' and all of the terms are used in this paper. I also use the word 'student' to remind me of the context of the issues we're discussing. I ask your forbearance for some generalisations that were used to help illustrate this topic.

1. Aspects of Adolescence

A definition of adolescence will be helpful**.** There is general agreement that adolescence is the time from puberty to early adulthood when the person is undergoing many transitions that overlap, with rapid physical, emotional, sexual, intellectual, social and behavioural development going on at the same time as the adolescent increases their awareness of the world outside of the family and school and their place in it. It is a time of increased vulnerability for the person going through this bio-social development. In general, the period of adolescence seems to equate with the years that an affluent, middle class person remains in school.

Many standard references give 13 to 18-21 (Petersen: '*Looking Forward Through the Lifespan'* 1996) as the adolescent development period. Some newer materials on child development now agree that the achievement of adulthood – that is when a person can begin to trust their own judgement and handle the more adult responsibilities of independent living, can be as late as 25. The recent Australian ABC Catalyst program on '*The Teen Brain'* (28 July 2005) provides an excellent resource for understanding the biological basis for this later age of mastery of impulses and improvement of judgement.

What are some of the developments taking place during the middle to late adolescent years?

- The 16 and 17 year year old's body is usually past its rapid physical development, but not always.
- The adolescent is still self conscious of physical appearance – but less so than when age 13 and 14.
- They remain very sensitive about being 'different' and look to the group to set norms for dress, appearance and activities.
- A sense of 'people are looking at me' summarises a time of painfully projecting on to others what they see as their own flaws, deficiencies and deformities.
- They look to the peer group for unconditional support and affirmation, but the group is looser and not as 'cliquey' as a couple of years earlier and it is possible to be part of several groups or change group affiliations according to different interest areas.

- Family remains very important for increasing a sense of independence. There is a process of the family setting boundaries, a teen pushes the boundaries, and via negotiation, there is usually some loosening of the restrictions as the young person makes mistakes, and learns to handle new situations.
- The peer group and the family have complementary, not competing, influences on the late adolescent. (Kimmel & Weiner 1995)
- Parents continue to influence their children throughout adolescence and 'are an important source of affection, help and support up to age 19'. (Kimmel & Weiner 1995)
- Adolescents may try on and reject different personas and ideas as their frame of reference moves from family and school to the larger world as questions are posed: 'What do I Think?" (my personal philosophy); 'What do I believe?' (same as parents or different?); 'What do I like and dislike?' 'How do I fit into the bigger scheme of the world?"
- Many in late teen years want to make a difference and can be very idealistic or depressed about the state of the world as they ask themselves 'How can I contribute?' and 'What do I want to do with my life?'
- This is universally a time of sorting out a sense of self. 'Who Am I'? gets answered by gradually developing a sense of belonging to a specific race and nationality, and identifying as part of a religious, cultural or family group.
- At the same time as there are differing and overlapping stages of development, it is common for there to concurrently be some regression to earlier stages of emotional development. (Mellor: 'Teen Stages' 2004) (Kutner 1997) There will be more about this point later.

Moving with an adolescent who is in high school

What happens when a young person is uprooted from the familiar to the unfamiliar? Children at this stage are gaining confidence in themselves, usually have a set of friends and have established a network and life of their own apart from the family. Their social self is forming but is still fragile. Just think about migrating or moving house. Parents know that the child in high school can be the most resistant to change and the most difficult to move. They may be miserable and demonstrate it, but being with the family anchors them – and text books and references consistently give family as the buffer that helps the young person to handle the stress of the changes. The young person remains within something familiar and comfortable while experiencing a range of social and environmental changes.

Wilson (2000) says the support of family assists the adolescent to face stresses and is a source of resilience, and knowing they have unconditional family support is a source of self worth for the adolescent.

Adolescent life for some students before the move to study in Australia

It is helpful to understand the experiences of mid adolescents in some Asian countries before they come to study in Australia. The following points are taken from the highly recommended book **'Teen Life in Asia' (**J. Slater (Ed) 2004 Greenwood Press).

- There are many similarities between middle class families in Asia and Australia.
- Life is structured around school, frequently the school organises participation in community service clubs and there is emphasis on after school social activities.
- In some countries, high school students may take on part time jobs.
- Public transport is generally very safe and middle and high school students travel freely on public transport to school and when meeting their friends in public places.
- Youth interests include talking on mobile phones, anime, action films, grooming, fashion, and food.
- Japanese youth culture is a model for many youths in other parts of E. Asia.
- Young urban students can be quite sophisticated compared to many Australian adolescents.

- Family life may be changing rapidly, and the image of the multi generational family all living together may or may not still apply, especially in urban areas.
- Many mothers work and the pace of life in urban areas can be quite hectic.

What is significantly different for the adolescent in East Asian countries?

- There are hierarchies of prestigious and less prestigious schools and universities, with significant pressure on young persons to achieve places in the top institutions.
- Places in high schools may be limited and entrance exams are used to determine who will get in.
- Study success is the key to the future and because proceeding from one level of school to another is highly competitive, students start young to prepare for high school or university entrance examinations.
- School and after school activities in most countries are usually highly structured and can cover a period of 6 or more days per week.
- Schoolwork and studying for exams is a major after school activity: 'a nightmare study schedule'.
- In So. Korea, it is common for high school students to attend boarding schools outside of the cities.
- In Taiwan, students may attend after school 'cram schools' until late at night, come home, do their homework, get a few hours sleep and go back to school.
- In Taiwan family honour may be tied up in how well the student does in exams.
- High levels of anxiety result and youth depression and youth suicide are common.

2. What Happens When A Person In Mid Adolescence Comes To Study In Australia?

Let us now assume that there are insufficient places in senior secondary school (Grade 11 and 12) in the home country, and the family has the best intention of giving this student a good education. State education departments, like universities, are very active in advertising the benefits of secondary education in Australia. The decision is made for a young person from Asia in his/her mid teen years to come to Australia to study.

To be eligible to accept international students, Queensland state schools need to have in place experienced support staff and excellent teaching programs, including English language support programs, and to have in place carefully selected home stay families

The Queensland government Department of Education (International) web site has information on the admission process; for example, to be accepted into a school program, the student needs to be passing their course in their home country and get 5.5 on the IELTS exam or an equivalent grade on a special secondary school English exam. Their English course may have been taken in Australia in the months before starting high school. To find out more, I contacted the Guidance Officer at Indooroopilly High School, the high school that is closest to my university, and was told:

- They have approximately 150 international students studying in yrs 11 and 12 (approximately 25% of the total population of the school of 640). Most of their international students are from Asian countries.
- Their international students are predominantly the same age as local students, that is 16 and 17 years old in Grades 11 and 12 (senior secondary school).
- Almost every young person arrives alone. They are collected from the airport by the school international staff member and brought to the pre arranged home stay family that the student's family has been in contact with, and a school familiarisation process follows.
- The school has designated support staff in place to provide assistance with the student's adjustment.

Considering the wide range of personalities and levels of maturity of 16 year olds, think about how the 16 years olds you know would handle this situation?

We may not know much about their backgrounds and experiences:

- Why exactly did these young people come to study in high school in Australia? Were they involved in the decision to come here? Have they travelled before? Did they have any idea what it would be like?
- How healthy were the relationships in their family? Was there divorce/parents pre-occupied with own affairs/parents confident of how to parent their child/was everyone mentally healthy?
- In their family background, was there neglect by busy parents, or has the child been sent overseas by parents to avoid conflict over adolescent issues?
- What about this young person's behaviour history or state of mental and physical health?
- In the school, this new person may not be welcomed by other students – this age group can be quite self absorbed and is not noted for being outgoing and inclusive. The new international student who is different could experience bullying, rejection by classmates or racial discrimination.
- The relationship between the student and their parents before they arrive in Australia may have a bearing on their adjustment and settling in Australia and after. This also affects their communication with their parents when they are so far away from home.
- How well they did when they were in studying in their home country may also affect their parents' expectation of how well they should be doing in Australia. There is a general impression in Asian countries that studying in Australia is less demanding, so if their children have been doing well in their home country, they should be able to excel in Australia. If they struggled to stay on top of their studies whilst in their home country, it is expected that they should be able to handle studies in Australia because it is believed to be less demanding.

From what we don't know to what we know:

- They have been uprooted from familiar surroundings in which they are increasingly competent to one where they have to start all over.
- At the very least, this move to a new country would be very unsettling and disruptive. Some resilient young people may thrive in this new setting. For some others, it could be very frightening.
- They are arriving alone in a place where they don't speak the language very well, to be collected by a stranger, and brought to an unfamiliar house, family, school and community.
- It is up to the young person to make major adaptations to all aspects of their new life. They must adapt quickly to the new school and language at a time when they are 'different' at an age when it's so important to their developmental stage to fit in.
- Adolescents who may have been popular and outgoing in their own culture may become shy and withdrawn and uncomfortable when they need to speak and function in English in the new country and school. (Kimmel & Weiner 1995)
- Educationally, their previous school may have valued rote learning, agreeing with the teacher, and operating within highly structured time frames.
- Most parents want the best education for their child. However, at the recent Queensland ISANA Professional Development Day, there was the suggestion that some young people with differing degrees of mental health issues are sent here to either secondary school or English institutes. Have some parents just forgotten to indicate the child's medical or special needs on the application forms?
- A young person whose state of physical or mental health is fragile could be quite traumatised by making this move to a new country.
- From my experience with foster children, I know that several factors affect 'normal' child development: neglect, abuse, enmeshment and abandonment. Does an adolescent who takes the journey by themselves to a new country, school and family feel abandoned? Surely most would feel some sadness and at least initial homesickness and loneliness.

- What do they do with all these emotions when they are at an age when it takes a sense of safety, confidence and intimacy to share these feelings?

I suggest it takes a very carefully prepared and resilient young person to overcome these obstacles and to successfully adapt under these conditions.

The Life Stress Chart

Because one of the basic premises of this discussion is that the move to study in Australia for most 16 and 17 year olds from Asian countries is highly stressful, this is a good time to revisit the famous Stress Chart that we come across from time to time. It assigns a value to various positive and negative life changes that cause an individual stress, with a higher number of points predisposing a person to illness. For example, out of a long list of events, the most stressful event (100 points) is for the death of a spouse. Of course this will not be the experience of a 16 year old, but included in the list are many events that do affect our new students. This is not a complete list, but a sample that includes those affecting families and those affecting our students:

Life Event	**Stress Value**
Death of spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marriage reconciliation	45
Change in health of family member	44
Change in living conditions (student)	25
Revision of personal habits (student)	24
Change in residence (student)	20
Change in schools (student)	20
Change in recreation (student)	19
Change in sleeping habits (student)	16
Change in number of family get togethers	15
Change in eating habits (student)	15

From 'Families and How to Survive Them' by Skynner & Cleese (1997 London: Vermillion) taken from Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe's social readjustment rating scale, Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Vol 11 (Pergamon Press, 1967)

A glance at the list shows that the cumulative effect of all of the changes experienced by the new 16 year old international student is considerably higher than the maximum points given for the death of a spouse!

3. The effect of different cultural-societal models

In thinking about the adaptation that students need to make, it is also useful to look at 2 cultural models that will affect students who come from Asian countries to study here. The following chart and discussion is courtesy of Queensland Transcultural Mental Health/Queensland University training materials (2004).

a) Collectivist vs Individualistic Societal Values

	Extremely Individualistic	**Extremely Collectivist**
Values	independence self-reliance self realisation for the individual	welfare, power, security of the group (extended family)
Maxims	'stand on your own 2 feet'	'the nail that sticks up gets hammered down'
Social Relations	egalitarian	Hierarchical
Desirable Behaviours/ Qualities	assertiveness, creativity directness, initiative, risk taking, efficiency, questioning, curiosity, self confidence	modesty, obedience, cooperation, respect, avoidance of 'loss of face' or shame, indirectness, conflict avoidance, interdependence
Identity	'I'	'we'

Adapted from: Brislin, R. (1993) Understanding Culture's Influence on Behaviour. USA: Harcourt, Brace College)

In general, Australia tends toward the individualist model. Most Asian cultures tend toward the collectivist model where decisions are made in consultation with family or extended family, obedience and respect for parents is expected, the group is more important than the individual, there is a greater cooperative approach to problem solving and avoiding conflict is important.

b) Another helpful model is that of Power Differences, which identifies relationships between:

- husbands/wives
- parents/children
- teachers/students
- elder/younger

A society like Australia that is characterised by a lower power differential is more egalitarian, and those with higher power differences, such as E. Asian countries, are more hierarchical.

These are helpful, rather than absolute, models with many variables, but they need to be kept in mind when thinking about the cumulative stresses on young international students. Again the Queensland Transcultural Mental Health training materials suggest there is 'much that is confusing and traumatic' in moving from a collectivist to an individualistic, and from a hierarchical to an egalitarian society'. 'Children, under school and peer pressure, tend to embrace the new values more quickly, but this also causes intergenerational strains'. And '(adjusting to different power distances) can be as confusing and traumatic as adjusting to a difference in individualism/ collectivism.

So young people from collective cultures, who may have little experience with independent thinking, decision making and living, now need to cope in a completely new setting.

I imagine that some students hide their fears by focussing on school work and can do quite well because study is what they are used to. Some will cope with this drastic change by seeking out 'older' students in the school who look like them and can explain (possibly in their native language) how the new system works. We all observe this very common phenomenon among Asian students, including the children of migrants. This grouping together, on the one hand, can be a helpful support for the young person during their settling in, but on the other hand, can lay the foundation for problems later on such as a dependency on a single peer group in which they are not 'different', limiting the need to take steps to integrate with the mainstream culture and students, and thereby reducing their participation in a range of social experiences that Australian teenagers usually have.

Regression during adolescence and periods of stress

- It is also common for adolescents to regress during their adolescent years. (Mellor 2004). And for adults and adolescents to regress when under stress. (Kutner 1997). It is also well known that in substitute family care, when a child is placed into a new family, significant regression takes place.
- So the teenager who is already at various intellectual, emotional, physical and social developmental levels simply by going through adolescence, has just come from overseas and it can be expected that there are new set backs to any progress made so far in bringing the various developmental stages into sync.

The authors of *Teen* Stages (Mellor, Finch Publishing, Sydney 2004) provided a summary of what teens need from parents that includes how to help with regression, and the consequences of less responsive parenting.

'Our job is to respond to both levels of need (physical age and regressed emotional age). To deal with their (adolescent's) regressiveness (sic), parents need to provide an intensity of contact, nurturing and other parenting that they (adolescents) need in order for the younger parts of them to grow up again. If parents do, they grow. Very importantly, if we do not respond with what they need, the adolescent can get very stuck. They may stay emotionally as children instead of maturing to adulthood.'

4. Parenting styles as they affect young international students

For the purpose of illustration, I am focussing on students in late adolescence who are on the academic margins and have demonstrated difficulty making the transition to university study. They have failed their courses and additionally seem frightened of many things. The series of stresses described above could have left young people fairly frozen in time in relation to handling the problems of growing up. And it is particularly sad when they say they cannot talk to their parents. This is what I wanted to understand next: how this parental relationship may have facilitated or hindered the student's development and adaptability while away from home.

- It would be very normal for any new and overwhelmed student who goes away to any new primary or secondary school or boarding school to phone home: 'I am unhappy and want to come home'.
- Is this option open to our new international student?

A colleague from Hong Kong explained that in Hong Kong there is a complete division between home and school. Parents send a child to school and expect the student to do his/her job, which is to study and for the school to do its job which is to educate the student. Parents seldom become involved in academic activities, and unlike in Australia, parents are not welcome to help in classes, especially in junior years. If they are called to school, it is usually because the student is in trouble. So if the child is unhappy in high school here and is from Hong Kong, they would tend not to complain to their parents about any problems at school.

Understanding this attitude toward the role of the school is very useful, whether or not it is exactly the same in other Asian countries. The level of understanding parents have of rhe Australian education system and culture affects how well equipped they are in supporting their children when they are studying in a far away country. It addition to attitudes to education, it is even more helpful to consider how different types of parenting may affect the young person's adaptation to their new school and life environment.

Parenting styles

Parenting styles and their relationship to child development are written about in most texts (Peterson 1996; Kimmel & Weiner 1995) on child and adolescent development. Parenting styles are usually a combination of several types, and the personality of the child and other dynamics needs to be considered when considering this. However, for the purpose of this discussion, it is useful to separate the different styles. They include

- Laissez faire or permissive parenting

  This is generally characterised as warm and tolerant and permitting a high degree of immature behaviour, or not monitor their child's behaviour. This could be demonstrated as either

  - Indifference, when the parent remains distant or aloof due to their own insecurity and uncertainty as parents. They may be preoccupied with their own needs, and thus not aware of their child's feelings, friends or activities.
  - Or indulgence, when the parent is warm and loving but uninvolved, with little interest in directing their child's behaviour or activities.

- Authoritative

  These parents set the rules, but the rules can be discussed and negotiated, allowing the adolescent to develop an increasing level of autonomy as a result of making decisions and learning from mistakes.

- Authoritarian

  These parents tend to enforce strict discipline, expect adherence to family rules, and operate very hierarchically as in 'what I say goes'. The child's perspective is not considered important. There is high involvement and concern with the outcome but lower level of warmth and discussion of feelings.

Several interesting points were made in the literature about the possible effect of extreme parenting styles.

- The strict authoritarian style of parenting seems more prevalent in Asian families. (Dornbush et al 1987).

- The adolescent who has experienced the more authoritarian or a domineering style of parenting is very vulnerable to being manipulated by domineering peers. Children intimidated by parents have no repertoire of questioning or handling this type of pressure from peers. (Kutner 1997)
- Parents being too restrictive can provoke rebellious and possibly dangerous behaviour. (Kutner 1997)
- The parenting experience of a highly compliant, conforming student is usually a combination of a controlling, authoritarian parent who is also warm and loving and highly involved with the student's experience. (Dornbush et al 1987)
- 'When a parent refuses to recognize a child's development, or a young person hesitates at being self reliant, the parent child relationship can become frozen in time.' (Kutner 1997)
- If a student has a poor emotional relationship with their parents and feels lonely and isolated, the student may gravitate toward a group that comes along and offers a sense of belonging. (Kutner 1997) This has implications for understanding gang membership.
- If a child has experience with making decisions and seeing the resulting consequences, this skill carries over to their relationship with peers and they are better able to avoid dangerous situations. (Kutner 1997)

None of the above is to suggest that clinical psychological problems will result from restrictive parenting styles, but complements what is known about separation from family, that the stress of the abrupt move away from family and the familiar can exacerbate psychological fragility. At the least I suggest some students who leave home and may not be able to get appropriate support and nurturing from their parent(s) can get stuck in an emotional age that is younger than their chronological age. However, there can be more severe consequences as well when the experience of coming to study in a new country is compared to migration and it is acknowledged that migration in general is a precondition for exacerbated mental health problems (Transcultural Mental Health Materials 2004).

A note about perceiving the parent as authoritarian

We regularly see younger students who tell us they cannot communicate with a parent. And this is said not only by the younger international students who have done high school in Australia. They describe what sounds like the authoritarian parent who sets the rules, chooses their child's course and cannot be or influenced to see student's point of view or indeed acknowledge their suffering. I have no doubt that many students are accurately describing an overly strict parent. It is equally possible for other students that by leaving home at a young age, and by not living day to day with their parents, they haven't developed a realistic picture of their parents nor worked out a way to renegotiate life issues with their parents. The relationship with the parent(s) can seem frozen in time and hasn't evolved from the age the student left home. As a result some students may perceive that their parent is more inflexible than the parent actually is.

It is worth mentioning the adjustment that parents too have to make when their child is away from home during these crucial developmental years. It must be worrying to imagine their child being safe in an unknown environment and this uncertainty can affect their confidence in being effective 'long distance' parents. Just as the child may not grow in their understanding of their parents as people due to their separation, parents too may have difficulty thinking of their child as more grown up than when they first left home and have trouble relating to and communicating with their 'Aussie' child.

Learning Life Skills

While high school staff and home stay families do an extraordinary job of caring for the young international student, another matter has recently emerged from work with children in substitute family care. It is the difference between providing adequate care for a child and providing the adolescent with training in preparation for independent living. Whose role it is to teach a young person how to manage the subtle and practical details of independent living, such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, laundry and money management? Does the school have courses in this? Is that part of the contract the home stay family signs? Or does the home stay family believe the parents are responsible for doing this, and the parents assume this is being done in the home stay family? Or is this practical life skills training not taking place? And if it is not part of their education during the high school years, then once the safety net of school, homework, teachers and home stay family is removed, the young person can be left to flounder when managing their own affairs.

What do we see when this student comes to university:

- I suggest that once the lid of the structured high school routine comes off, students who have been traumatised and possibly feel abandoned can start to feel lost.
- This can be demonstrated by their fear of making mistakes and their difficulty in adapting to change.
- They may have difficulty making decisions. They frequently have difficulty with time management.
- Through lack of experience and training, they may lack experience with managing their own freedom, money and personal time, yet be old enough to sign leases and buy cars.
- Some of these students seem quite paralysed, not able to think or imagine how to proceed.
- A degree of depression can be evident.
- Once they fail, fear of their parents adds to their distress.

In summary

It has been very useful to revisit this theoretical material as it relates to so many students I see in my daily work. Of particular use has been to

- Review how the move away from family can affect the normal development of those in their middle adolescent years.
- Review the active role of parents in helping young people mature and adapt to change.
- Consider how various styles of parenting may play a role in a young person's personality traits, and how they may leave a young person vulnerable to social and group pressures.

I have also started to better understand other groups of students, for example, those moving from Foundation to University studies, and in particular find that some of this material may help to understand and support some students from South Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

Time restraints have not permitted including in this discussion the junior secondary school age (14 to 15 year old) international students who live away from their family during the early adolescent years, the boarding school experience as a variation on home stay, and how spending crucial formative years in a second culture affects the student's sense of 'Who Am I?'. All of these and the topics in this paper warrant further study.

Conclusion and Discussion

Most international high school students have both the resilience and family support to successfully navigate the transitions to high school in Australia and on to tertiary study. For others, there may have been sufficient trauma associated with similar life events, complicated by cultural factors and unmet emotional needs, that leaves them stuck and unable to deal with adult choices and responsibilities when these are thrust upon them.

For many young international students, we can be grateful if the worst that happens is that they only fail their university courses.

Our challenge is: once we make contact with these 'at risk' students, what can we do to help nurture and encourage, and sometimes re parent them?

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