

## **Providing a 'holding' environment to international students to promote successful adjustment**

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Various factors influence international students' adjustment to studying overseas. The ease in which a new language and culture is embraced is a well acknowledged attribute. The other less often recognized and acknowledged aspect is the students' ability to temporarily relinquish the comfort of familiar home environment and to manage separation anxiety in order to accommodate to a new culture. Studying away from home is a challenging experience often fraught with anxiety.

Winnicott's theory of 'holding' environment provides a good model for ameliorating potential separation as well as psychological problems amongst international students. The concept of 'holding' proposed by Winnicott is particularly relevant in the experience of International education as going overseas for further studies at a critical developmental stage, before returning home is an interim period to adulthood. 'Holding' refers to understanding and empathy but also to perceived psycho-social support.

Knowledge of the function of 'holding' in International education could contribute not only to an understanding of adjustment but also to an understanding of mental health among the population. Serious mental health problems have been reported among International students and further understanding of preventive measures could reduce the likelihood of mental breakdown. This paper discusses ways to provide a 'holding' environment to assist international students to adjust more successfully to a new culture and country.