Making Them Whole:
International Students, Mental Health and Membership
Dr. Daniel To

1

Making Them Whole: International Students, Mental Health and Membership

- Husband to Michelle

- Father to Madeline Reine & Spencer Morgan

- District Principal, Education Services

- Instructor, Master of Arts, Trinity Western University, Global Program

- Bachelors and Masters of Education (Curriculum), University of British Columbia

- Doctor of Education (Leadership), Simon Fraser University

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Why are we here?

Why are they here

TRACK AND FIELD MEET

SURREY CITY HALL

CANADA DAY CELEBRATIONS
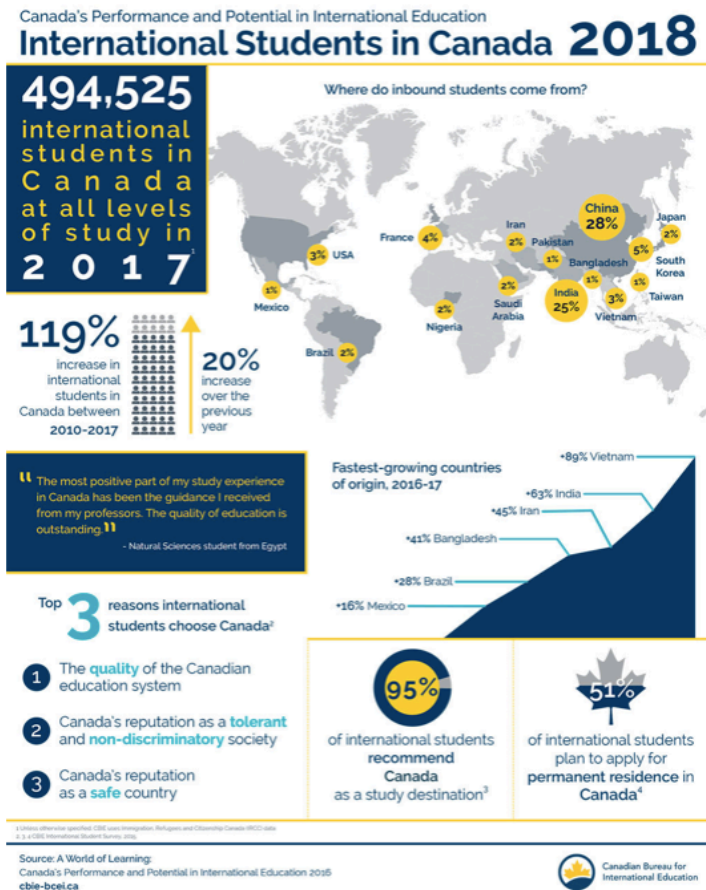
Photo credit: City of Surrey

What we sometimes forget

- These are kids
- These are kids who have left home
- These are kids who have left home, and come to a country they barely know
- These are kids, who have left home, come to a country they barely know, don't speak the language (for the most part)
- These are kids, who have left home, come to a country they barely know, don't speak the language and....

What we sometimes forget

All Alone

What we sometimes forget

Even with

- A great home stay
- A welcoming school district
- A supportive school
- A fantastic agent/custodian
- Kids will still sometimes feel

What we sometimes forget

All Alone

And this loneliness

- Lower Self Esteem
- Depression
- Unhealthy social connections
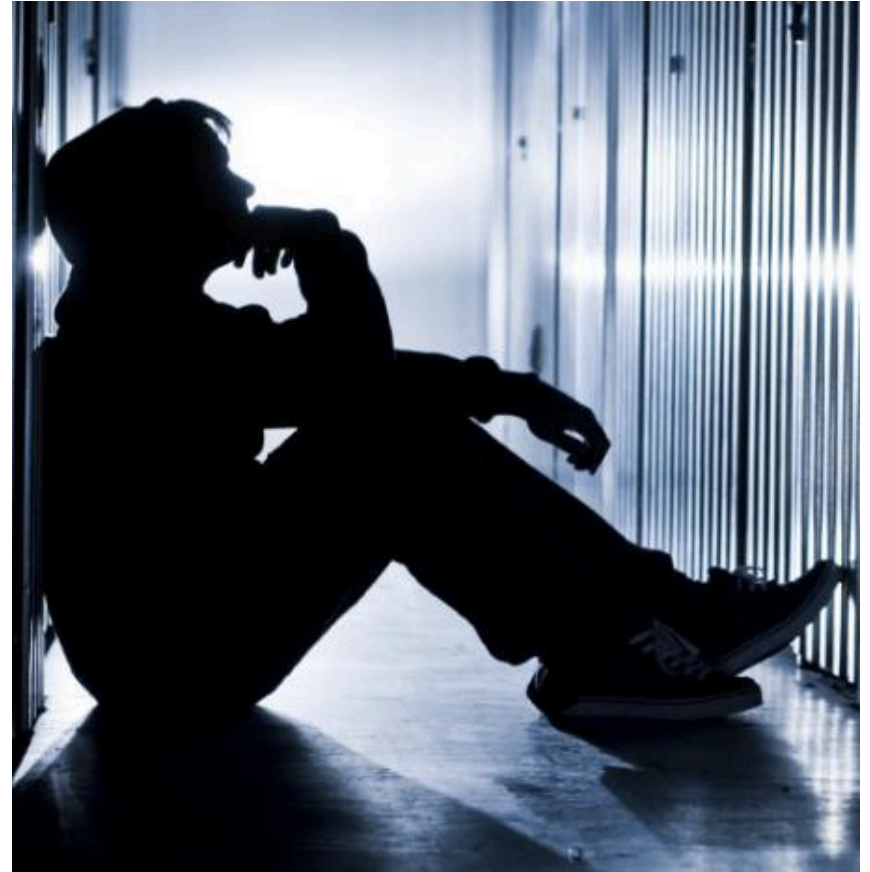- Unhealthy eating habits
- Mood changes
- Anxiety

Mental Health Challenges

Mental Health Issues

- Silent
- Intense
- Persist over a long period of time
- Different from physical ailments
- Confused for physical ailments
- Issues can compound
- Example: Ear Ache vs. Psych Ache

Dr. Ian Manion, Ph.D, Canadian Psychatritric Institute for Mental Health Research
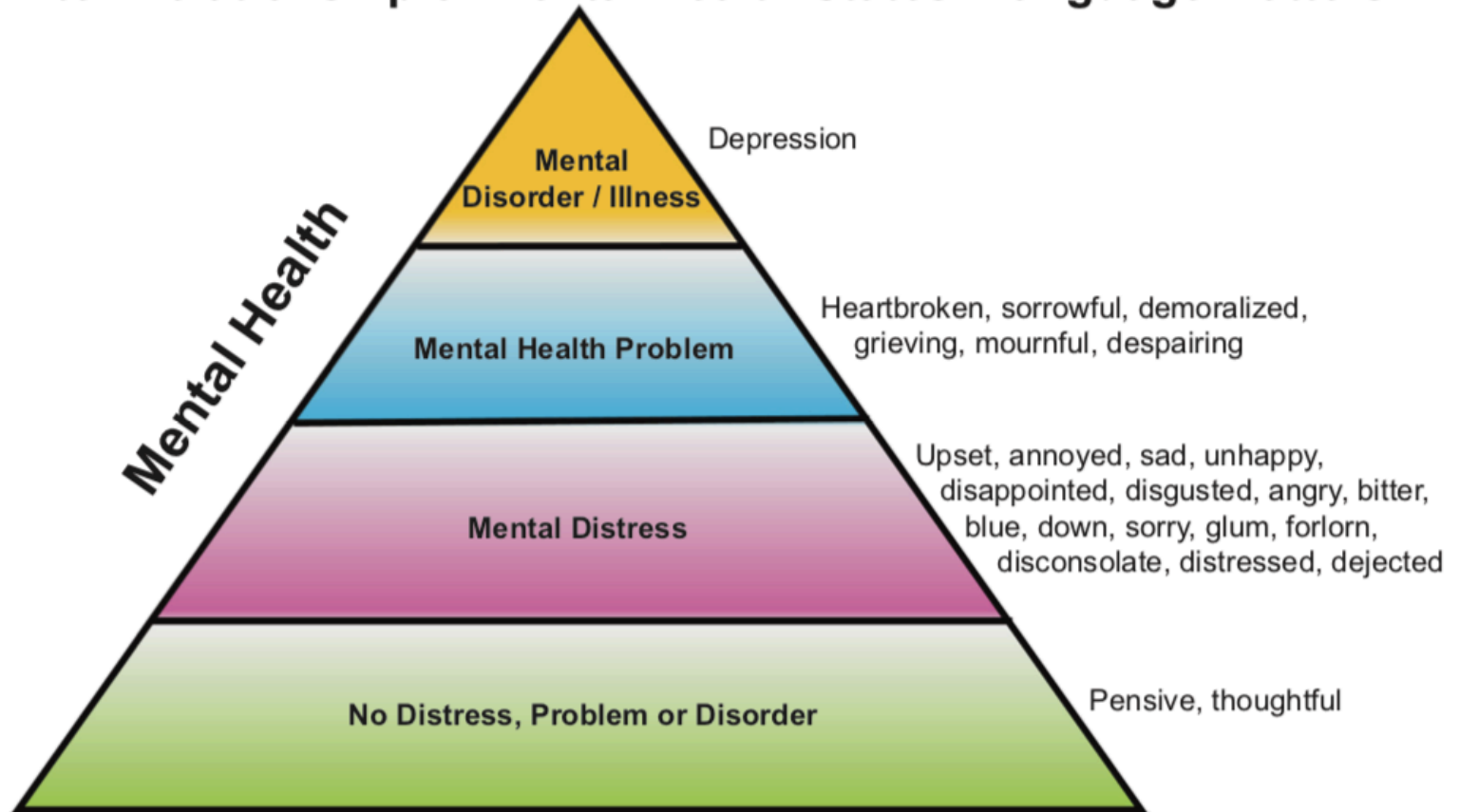
Wait a minute, how did you get there?

- Ages 14-17 is when anxiety hits the most in people
- Often mental health issues go unnoticed – come out as physical symptoms, and doctor gives good bill of health when finds no physical issues
- We socialize our kids (and therefore inadvertently some of our international kids to "suck it up" because it's just a teenage "phase".

Dr. Ian Manion

- Immigrants have a higher percentage of health and mental health problems after being in Canada over a 7 year period
- Part of the reason for this is that immigrants don't understand our medical system.
- Kids separated from at least 1 parent for more than a year, 300% increased chance of developing psychosis.
- If kid is moved into foster care – more than 300% chance of developing psychosis

Dr. Kwame McKenzie, Wellesley Institute

Wait a minute, how did you get there?

The Inter-Relationship of Mental Health States: Language Matters

Mental Health

- **Mental Disorder / Illness** — Depression
- **Mental Health Problem** — Heartbroken, sorrowful, demoralized, grieving, mournful, despairing
- **Mental Distress** — Upset, annoyed, sad, unhappy, disappointed, disgusted, angry, bitter, blue, down, sorry, glum, forlorn, disconsolate, distressed, dejected
- **No Distress, Problem or Disorder** — Pensive, thoughtful

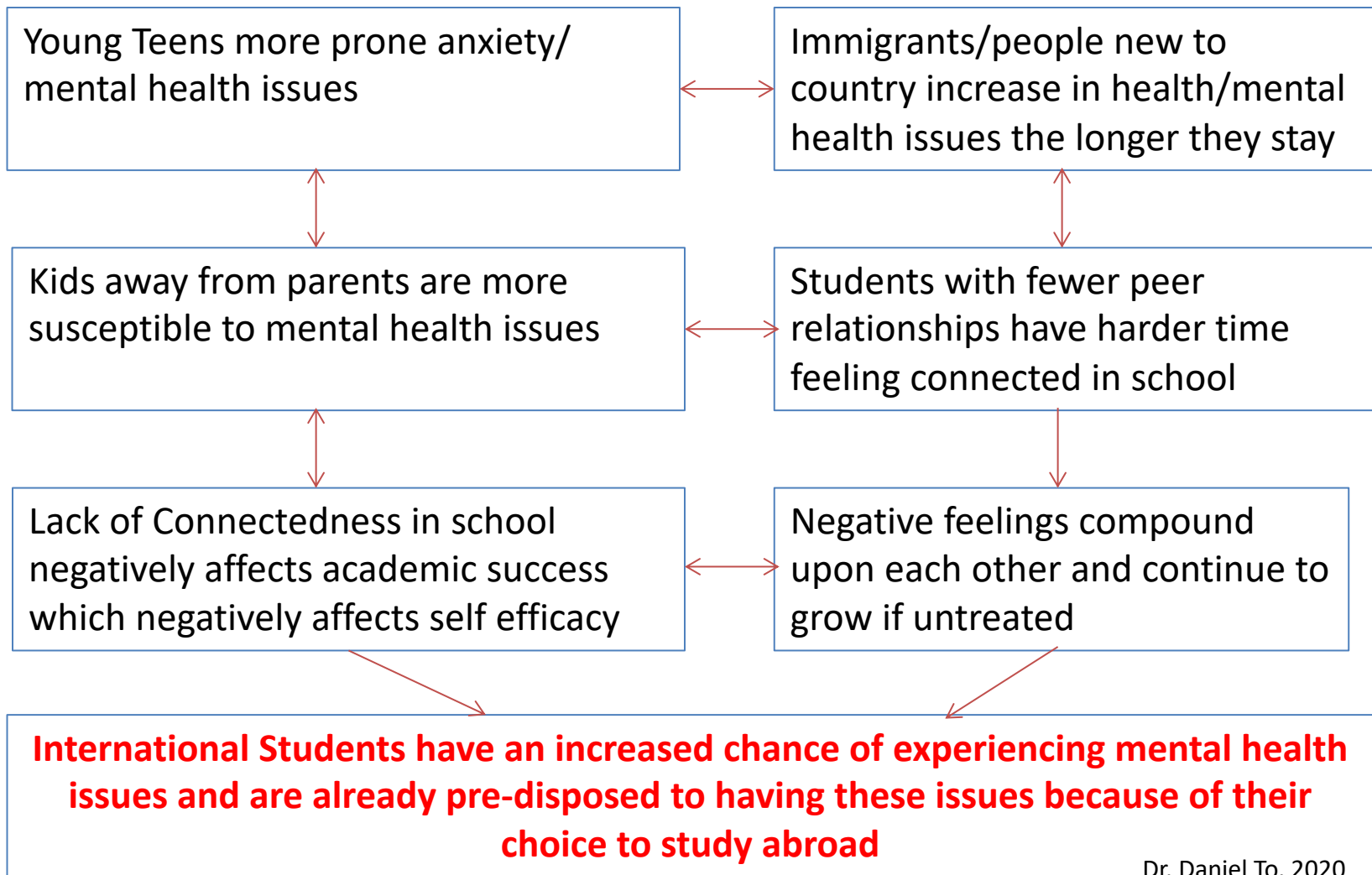Dr. Stan Kutcher @ teenmentalhealth.org

Wait a minute, how did you get there?

- Students who have very few peer relationships have a decreased chance of experiencing a feeling of connectedness affecting their self-efficacy and academic success
- At the age when many students come over, they are also at the crucial age where they are transferring their feeling of membership (belonging) from family to social networks.

- Academic success is affected negatively when students do not feel a sense of membership within a school system.
- Engagement in school and social activities within a school is limited if students do not feel a sense of membership.
- Lack of Academic success and engagement and, an overall lack of feeling of membership leads to lower self-efficacy (self esteem)

Dr. Daniel To, 2017

Let's Connect
The Dots

Young Teens more prone anxiety/ mental health issues

Immigrants/people new to country increase in health/mental health issues the longer they stay

Kids away from parents are more susceptible to mental health issues

Students with fewer peer relationships have harder time feeling connected in school

Lack of Connectedness in school negatively affects academic success which negatively affects self efficacy

Negative feelings compound upon each other and continue to grow if untreated

International Students have an increased chance of experiencing mental health issues and are already pre-disposed to having these issues because of their choice to study abroad

Dr. Daniel To, 2020

The Solution?

Don't Change your Practice

Change your Perspective!

What we try and do

Alas…

Without membership, the engagement in any sort of learning is temporary, as the social constructs that surround membership, which is crucially important to student success, would be lacking.
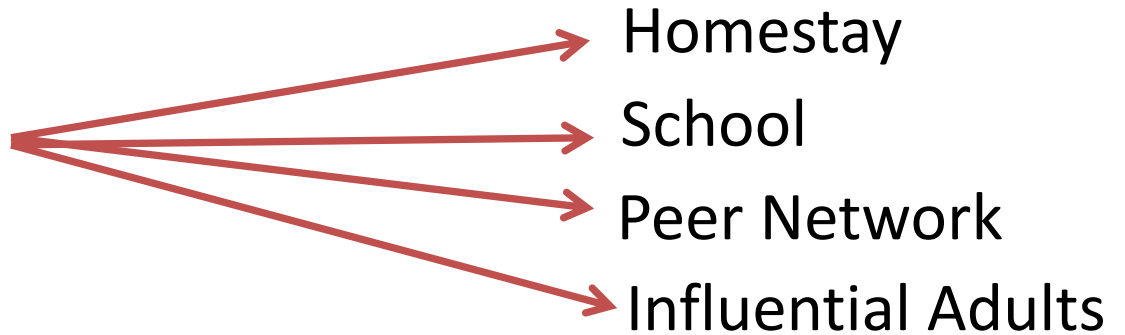
But what is the…

The Key is

Transference of Membership

Family → Homestay
Family → School
Family → Peer Network
Family → Influential Adults

The Key is

Self-actualization
desire to become the most that one can be

Esteem
respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom

Love and belonging
friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection

Safety needs
personal security, employment, resources, health, property

Physiological needs
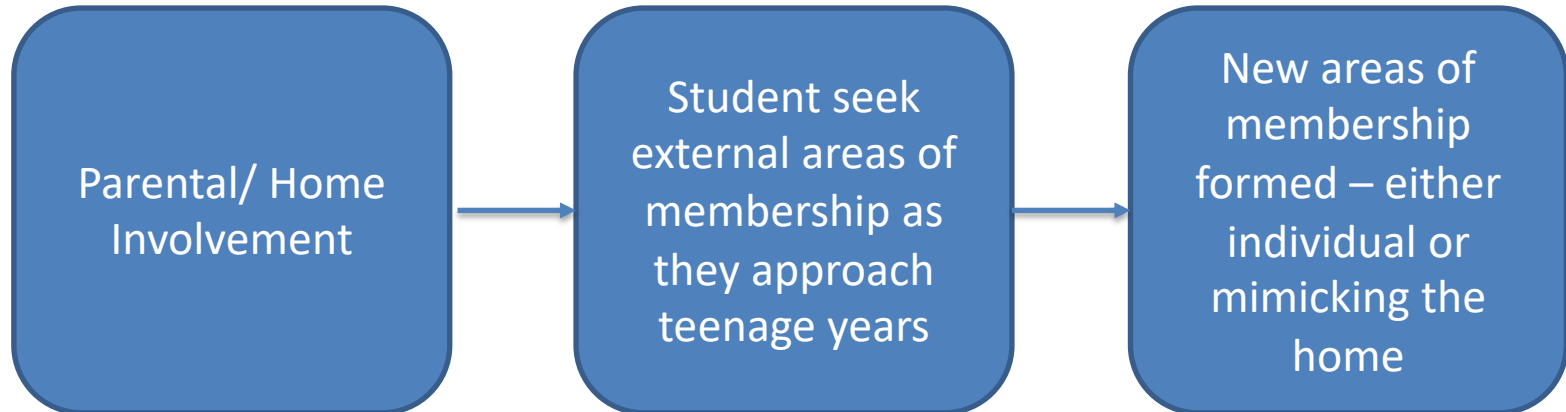air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction

Transferring and Creating Sense of Membership

Scaffolding Pattering of Children's Perceived Self-Efficacy

1. Parent's interest/a child in a task(s) that they feel will increase their social and academic development

2. Parents give opportunities to their children to have a feeling of self-efficacy and achievement in the task

3. Maintaining the pursuit of the goal, through motivation of the child and direction of the activity

4. Act in ways that build academic, social, and self-regulatory efficacy, raise aspirations, and promote achievements
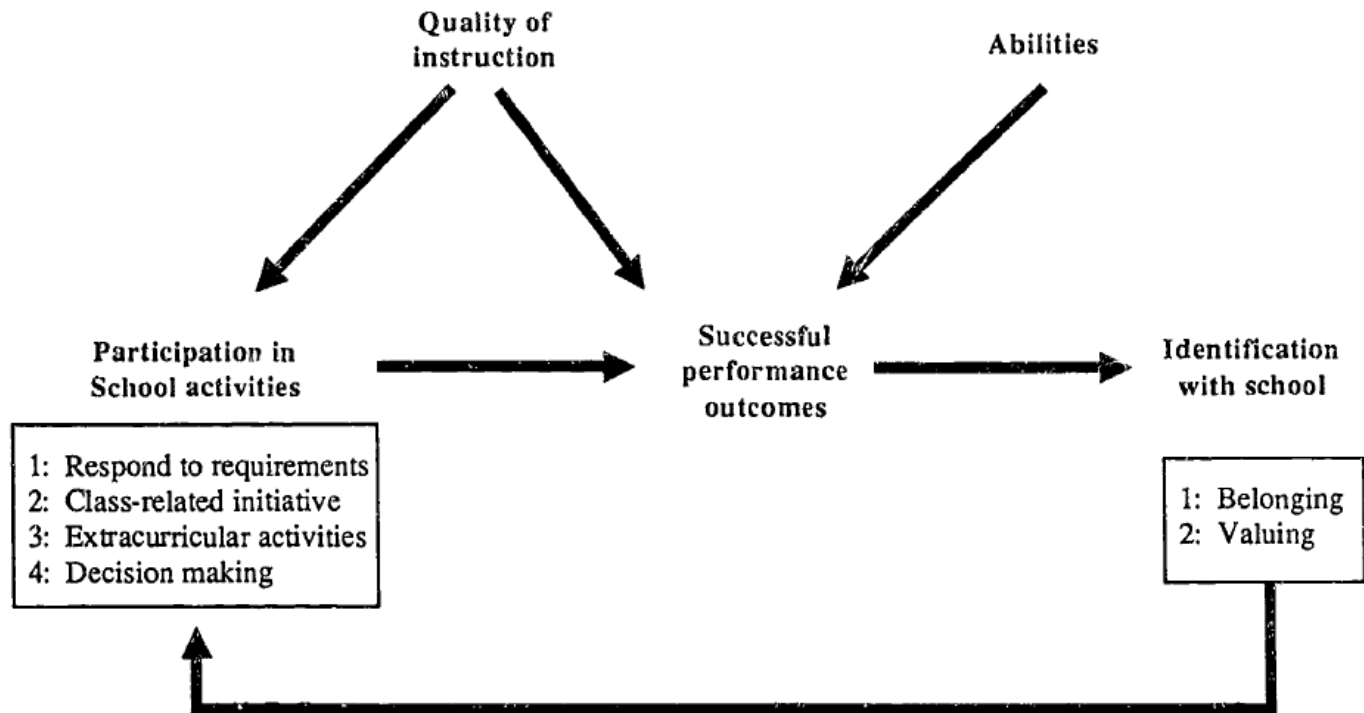
(Bandura et al., 2001)

From Dr. Daniel To
Ed.D Thesis, 2017

Transferring and Creating Sense of Membership

Parental/ Home Involvement	→	Student seek external areas of membership as they approach teenage years	→	New areas of membership formed – either individual or mimicking the home

From Dr. Daniel To
Ed.D Thesis, 2017

The Key is

Finn's Participation and Identification Model (1993)

Quality of instruction

Abilities

Participation in School activities → Successful performance outcomes → Identification with school

Participation in School activities:
1: Respond to requirements
2: Class-related initiative
3: Extracurricular activities
4: Decision making

Identification with school:
1: Belonging
2: Valuing

1. Help student stay connected to their home family

2. The Homestay needs to build a relationship with the student's home family to build the transference of trust into the new home (Gordon Neufeld)

3. The Homestay family and Custodian need to encourage the student to take membership in the school community

4. The School needs to give International Student opportunities for true membership.

5. The School needs to set up purposeful peer groups/ membership opportunities for International Students.

6. International Students need trusted adults in their lives AND maintain a connection with their families at home.

Summary and Conclusion

1. International Students, by virtue of their very nature – are more prone to mental health issues: in particular anxiety and psychosis

2. We need to be intentional and thoughtful in how we work with international students in order to give them a chance at increased self-efficacy and academic success.

3. People working with International Students can take purposeful steps to lessen mental health issues in this population through setting up and maintaining specific relationships with them.

4. We need to empower them to seek out opportunities to seek out avenues for creating and increasing their sense of membership in their new community.

Additional Resources

As chosen by my District Counsellor Tajinder Rai

- 5 Unique Mental Health Stressors Faced by International Students

- https://www.eaie.org/blog/5-mental-health-stressors-international-students.html

- Mental Health: What it Means for International Students and How you can help

- https://blog.ingleinternational.com/mental-health-what-it-means-for-international-students-and-how-you-can-help/

- Ontario Mental Health – Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Support for International Students

- http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/promoting-mental-health-awareness-and-support-for-international-students/

Contact

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Slides and Resources at:

www.drdanielto.com