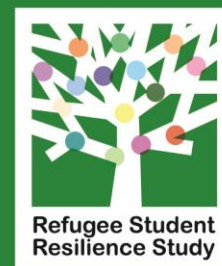


# Key Issues Paper No. 4



## School practices to support students from refugee backgrounds<sup>1</sup>

Extensive research has identified effective school practices for students from refugee backgrounds. We conducted a literature review to identify research of Australian and international inclusive primary and secondary school practices for students from refugee backgrounds. This Key Issues paper presents a summary of this review. This paper does not intend to be comprehensive, nor include the full range of literature available. Rather it provides a brief summary of literature relevant to high income countries' resettlement contexts. The paper focuses on six key areas of effective school practice that may create positive education experiences for students from refugee backgrounds. These include:

- A welcoming ethos
- Focussed policy
- Strong leadership
- Inclusive curriculum and classroom practices
- Holistic view of successful inclusion
- Building an environment that promotes resilience

### A Welcoming Ethos

- Thorough induction processes and transition programmes for newly arrived or transitioning students and their families (Bačáková & Closs, 2013; Correa-Velez, Gifford, McMichael, & Sampson, 2016; Olliff & Couch, 2005);
- Ongoing and regular events and programs that foster inclusion and the celebration of diversity (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Bajaj, Argenal, & Canlas, 2017; Block, Cross, Riggs, & Gibbs, 2014);
- Bicultural staff may be employed and have strong agency within the school (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Pugh, Every, & Hattam, 2012); and
- Family-school partnerships are supported (Bačáková & Closs, 2013; Bajaj, et al., 2017; Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Morrison & Allen, 2007; Peterson & Ladky, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> Baak, M., Johnson, B., Sullivan, A., Slee, R., Brown, J. L. & Miller, E. (2019). School practices to support students from refugee backgrounds, *Refugee Student Resilience Study Key Issues Paper No. 4*. University of South Australia. doi: 10.25954/5cc26fca80bb1

## **Focused Policy**

- Students from refugee backgrounds are specifically included and referenced in school policies (Wellbeing Policy; Anti-Discrimination policy; Diversity policy) and their heterogeneous experiences, skills and needs are described and acknowledged (Pinson & Arnot, 2010; Rutter, 2006; Sidhu & Taylor, 2007);
- Schools may have specific policies, practices and processes that outline responses to exclusion through discrimination, racism, or othering of students from refugee backgrounds (Aveling, 2007; Baak, 2018; Correa-Velez, et al., 2016; Keddie, 2012; Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan, & Taouk, 2009); and
- School policy builds on a positive view of student skills and capability (Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2013).

## **Strong Leadership**

- School leaders define and promote a strengths-based approach for the broader school community of staff, students and families (McMaster, 2015; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2016);
- Leadership staff actively promote communication and collaboration with service providers, families and communities (Keddie, 2011);
- School leaders prioritise and understand the unique strengths, needs and experiences of students from refugee backgrounds (Rutter, 2006);
- Leaders have a strong commitment to ongoing staff professional development that is centred around the cultural, linguistic and personal needs and strengths of students with refugee experiences (Mansouri, et al., 2009; Morrison & Allen, 2007); and
- Leadership actively encourages the implementation of inclusive and anti-discrimination strategies (Aveling, 2007).

## **Inclusive Curriculum and Classroom Practices**

- Curriculum is accessible and flexible to the skills and needs of students from all backgrounds (Loreman, 2014; Woods, 2009);
- Staff design assignments and learning environments that allow for different instruction methods, learning styles and needs whilst delivering the same curriculum (Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006; Loreman, 2014; Miller, Austin Windle, & Yazdanpanah, 2014);
- Inclusive curriculum integrates learning about and celebrates many cultures (Bačáková & Closs, 2013; Pinson, Arnot, & Candappa, 2010);
- Opportunities to study home languages are provided to students (Cummins, 2005); and
- Opportunities are provided to students to celebrate and share strengths including multilingual skills and cultural knowledge (Bajaj, et al., 2017; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Hek, 2005).

## **Holistic View of Successful Inclusion**

- Schools have strong multi-agency, family, community leader and individual student relationships that ensure students from refugee backgrounds receive relevant support in social, educational, developmental and emotional domains (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Woods, 2009);

- Schools provide opportunities for all students to form reciprocal relationships in a range of school-based programs (academic and otherwise) (Due & Riggs, 2009; Uptin, et al., 2013, 2016); and
- Schools actively promote and support students to access a range of short and long term educational and employment pathways (Olliff & Couch, 2005; Rutter, 2006).

## Building an Environment that Promotes Resilience

- Student-teacher relationships ensure that students feel connected and provide support when relevant (Baak, 2016; Johnson, 2008);
- Teachers listen to students and are active advocates for the students (Johnson, 2008);
- Students are actively supported to engage with school life, including building social bonds and academic achievement (Cohen, 2013; Morrison & Allen, 2007; Ungar, Russell, & Connelly, 2014); and
- Members of the school community of educators participate in decision making, are supported to build their practice and connect with each other, and they have access to professional learning that promotes a strengths based approach (Morrison & Allen, 2007).

## Refugee Student Resilience Study Overview

The *Refugee Student Resilience Study* aims to investigate how schools transcend the past life experiences of students from refugee backgrounds by creating the social and educational conditions that enhance resilience. It is focusing on the policies, practices, relationships, and events that shape the schooling experiences of students and promote their resilience. The research will collect data from a selection of case study secondary schools in two Australian states, including regional and metropolitan locations. These schools will contribute to the research with contextual data relating to good practices that enhance resilience for students from refugee backgrounds.

Education is recognised as a key protective factor in facilitating successful settlement and positive lifelong outcomes for young people from refugee backgrounds. Young people from refugee backgrounds have often had disrupted experiences of education prior to displacement and while language acquisition remains important in refugee education in Australia, we argue that schools may have a more holistic role to play in supporting students from refugee backgrounds. Schools are sites in which students from refugee backgrounds may access opportunities for academic, social, emotional and cultural learning and development.

For further information please see [www.refugeesatschool.edu.au](http://www.refugeesatschool.edu.au)

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- Australian Refugee Association (ARA)

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