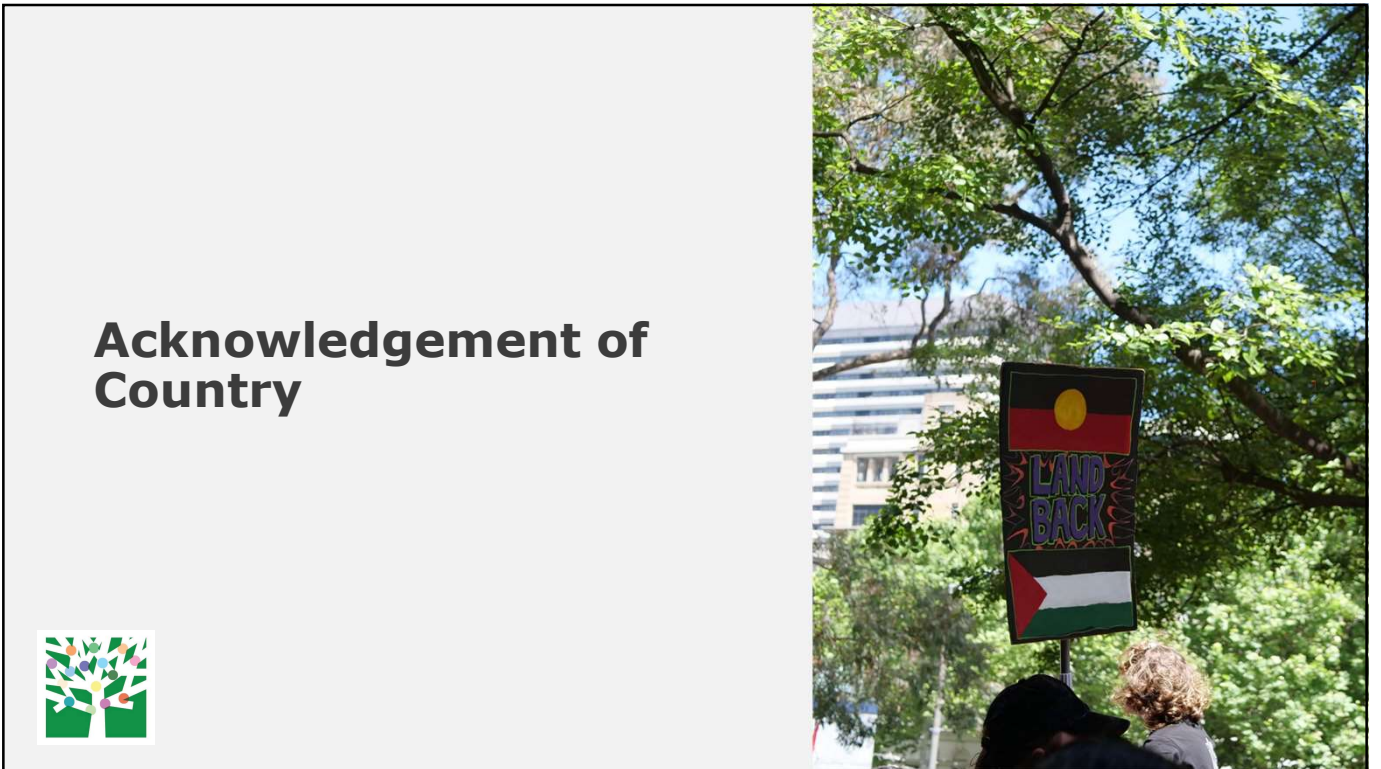




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## Who are we

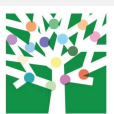
- Dr Melanie Baak, Senior Lecturer, University of South Australia  
[melanie.baak@unisa.edu.au](mailto:melanie.baak@unisa.edu.au)
- With Emeritus Professor Bruce Johnson and Professor Anna Sullivan
- Acknowledgement of project research assistants: Dr Emily Miller, Dr Sally Morgan, Jenn Brown, Dr Neil Tippet and Dr Jamie Manolev



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## Collaborative Partners

This research is funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council Linkage Scheme (LP170100145).



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## Background to the study

Significant challenges at school experienced by students of refugee background due to:

- Low levels of English language acquisition & literacy
- Interrupted schooling
- Difficulties adjusting to school & life in Australia
- Past experiences of trauma and dislocation

Past research:

focus on these challenges

deficit understandings of these students

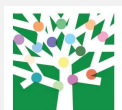
- 'labelling'
- lowering of expectations
- fatalism, despondency, despair
- And 'victim blaming' if 'interventions' designed to 'fix' them don't work



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## A different perspective in this study

- Focuses on the **role of schools** in creating supportive and inclusive environments that respond to the needs of students from refugee backgrounds
- Looks at the '**schooling conditions**' – particular policies, practices, relationships, and events – that enable refugee students to adapt and cope, despite their challenges
- Uses insights from research into 'resilience'






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# Overview of the Project

## Research questions:

1. What are the current federal and state policies guiding the provision of refugee education in Australia?
2. How do school leaders interpret and enact these policies when developing local school policies and practices that enhance the resilience of students from refugee backgrounds?
3. What aspects of school life do refugee background students believe promote their resilience, wellbeing and success at school?

-  Stage 1: Reconnaissance – a critical policy analysis of the field of refugee education (2018-19)
-  Stage 2: Local school refugee education policy development and enactment (2019-20)
-  Stage 3: Refugee students' perspectives on resilience promoting aspects of school life (2020-22, some delays due to COVID)



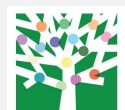
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## Reflection



Who are students from refugee backgrounds in your schools (i.e. how are they identified, what are their countries of heritage, language repertoires, histories)?

What are some of the **challenges your school has in supporting** students from refugee backgrounds?



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## What are the challenges?



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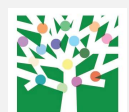
## How do we frame refugees in our schools?

### What did we find in our research?

- **Stage 2** – students are usually framed as in deficit through funding allocations relating to EALD and through responses to trauma
- A need to see beyond EALD and trauma

### Student's experiences of how they are framed

- Language repertoires not recognised (internalisation of English as the only language that matters)
- Multilingual practices in literacy – how are they acknowledged
- Other curriculum areas



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### The White Stuff

They talk about stuff here.  
But not the stuff outside of Australia or outside of  
their European...  
you know, the white stuff  
Yeah, the white stuff  
And I think that's not very good

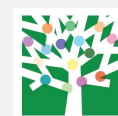
Especially in History  
People don't know  
Like my [Australian] friend didn't know  
she thought Jesus was white!  
She really did.  
She didn't know he was from Jerusalem  
And the first ever city that people lived in was  
Damascus in Syria  
They didn't know any of that

They just they thought  
where we come from,  
it's just walls  
and people hung  
and hunger, poverty

## Students' experiences of how they're framed

After Syria I went to Lebanon and was everything in French. For two years I used to do physics and chemistry in French and my French was good. I didn't know any French from before. I learnt it from Lebanon and I used to go and like, you know, speak with the teacher in French and read the French book, and I really enjoyed.

But when I went to Adelaide, I forget the language because I have to focus on the English.



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## Stage 1: Critical Policy Analysis

Tier	Jurisdiction	Year	Policy
1	United Nations	1989	Convention on the Rights of the Child
1	Congregation for Catholic Education	2013	Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love
1	Congregation for Catholic Education	2014	Educating Today and Tomorrow: a Renewing Passion
1	Pope Francis	2018	Message of his holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018
2	Australia	2017	Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful
2	Australia	2017	Schooling Resource Standard (SRS)
2	Australia	2017	Humanitarian Settlement Program
4	SA Department for Ed	n.d.	English as an Additional Language or Dialect program (EALD)
3	SA Department for Ed	n.d.	Ethnic and community language schools
4	SA Department for Ed	2012	School Enrolment policy
3	SA Department for Ed	n.d.	Community Development program
4	CESA	2017	Cultural Diversity and Learning policy
4	CESA	n.d.	CESA EAL program
4	CESA	2015	Children: Close to the Mystery of God (Stimulus Paper)
4	CESA	2012	Multicultural Education policy
4	CESA	2011	Care, Wellbeing and Protection of Children and Young People policy
4	Qld Department of Ed	2016	Queensland Multicultural Action Plan: 2016-17 to 2018-19
4	Qld Department of Ed	2018	Inclusive Education policy
4	Qld Department of Ed	n.d.	English as an additional language or dialect learners policy
3	Qld Department of Ed	n.d.	Refugee Program
4	Qld Department of Ed	n.d.	Supporting Student Health and Wellbeing Policy Statement
4	Qld Department of Ed	2017	Fee exemptions policy
4	Brisbane Catholic Ed	n.d.	Inclusive Education
4	Brisbane Catholic Ed	n.d.	Support Process for Assisting and Assessing Students from a Refugee Background
4	Brisbane Catholic Ed	2018	Student Wellbeing Policy
4	Qld Catholic Education Commission	2010	International education in Catholic schools in Queensland
4	Qld Catholic Education Commission	2014	Inclusive practices in Catholic schools in Queensland
4	The Archdiocese of Brisbane	2015	To the people of God of the archdiocese of Brisbane

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## Stage 1 Findings

Education policy for students from refugee backgrounds is mostly framed in broad policies that espouse rights, inclusion and access to education.

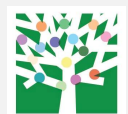
Specific refugee education policies are dominated by psychological thinking that justifies therapeutic 'interventions' to 'fix' the problems of students from refugee backgrounds caused by exposure to trauma and torture (i.e. wellbeing policies) and unfamiliarity with English (i.e. EALD policies).



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## Reflection

What are some of the practices that you think work well with RBG students in your school? Are these informed by policy?



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## Stage 2 Approach

### How schools were selected

- identified 'good practice' schools re criteria drawn from previous research
  - ❖ A welcoming ethos
  - ❖ Existing policies
  - ❖ Leadership
  - ❖ Inclusive practices
  - ❖ Holistic view of inclusion
- conversations with a range of stakeholders working with schools and student from refugee backgrounds to identify schools

### Process of data collection

- walking tours and interviews with school leaders
- individual interviews with a range of school staff
- collecting policy texts, observations & photos of the school physical environment

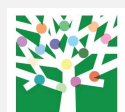


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## Stage 2 Data Collection

	Government Sector	Catholic Sector	Total
South Australia	2	1	3
Queensland	3	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>

Role	Total
Principal	7
Senior Leader	7
Head of Department/Coordinator	7
EALD Specialist	10
Student Support Officer (SSO's/BSSO's)	6
Classroom teachers	4
Administrative staff	6
Pastoral Care (Counsellors, wellbeing)	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>



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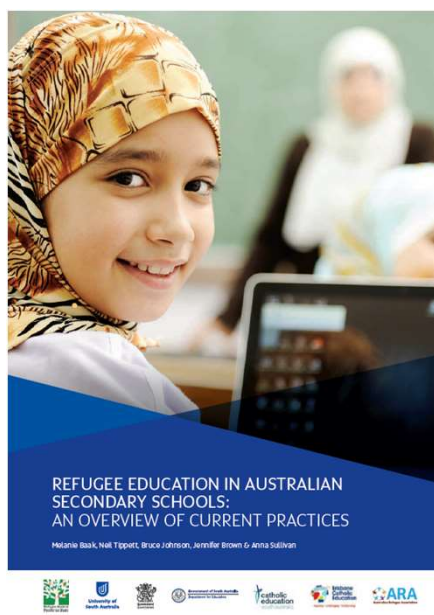
## Current School Practices

Six key domains were identified

1. **School ethos** refers to the values, beliefs, norms and assumptions that influence the ways students from refugee backgrounds are treated in school.
2. **Celebrating diversity** refers to a range of practices that value and commemorate the different cultural traditions and practices of students from refugee backgrounds.
3. **Targeted support** refers to interventions that address the complex learning, social, and emotional needs of students from refugee backgrounds.
4. **Positive relationships** refers to human connections and social exchanges at school characterised by respect, care and trust.
5. **Parental involvement** refers to a range of strategies designed to engage parents of students from refugee backgrounds in school-related activities.
6. **Community partnerships** refers to relationships between schools and service organisations that support the needs of students from refugee backgrounds.



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## Stage 3 research process

Interactive workshops conducted face-to-face or online with refugee students in 7 schools
















In the first workshop, students were introduced to the study, discussed the idea of resilience, and began planning an artefact which would express their schooling experiences

In the second workshop, students were asked to share and discuss the artefact they had produced


















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What parts of school matter?

 School Spaces	 Teachers	 Australian Curriculum Subjects and Classes
 Racism and Racial Bias	 Diversity	 Friends
 Family	 Sports	 Cultural Events
		
		

Ways to show us about your experiences

 Talk with Us	 Take Photos	 Draw
 Write a Song	 Make a Video	 Take Us on a School Tour
 Write a Poem	 Interview Someone	
		
		

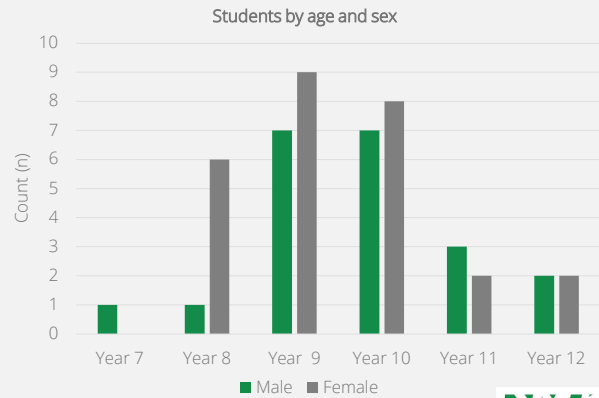
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## Stage 3 Data Collection

In total, 48 students from refugee backgrounds were involved:

- 21 Males & 27 Females
- Ranged from Year 7 -12
- 23 in Queensland; 25 in South Australia

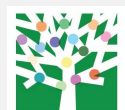
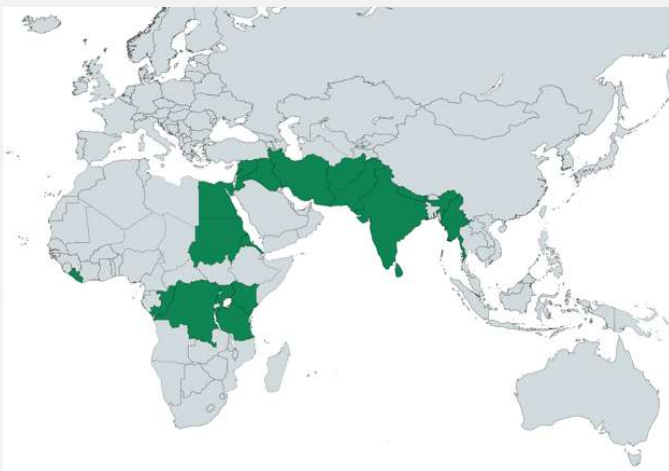
Students had lived in Australia for differing amounts of time, ranging from 18 months to 10+ years



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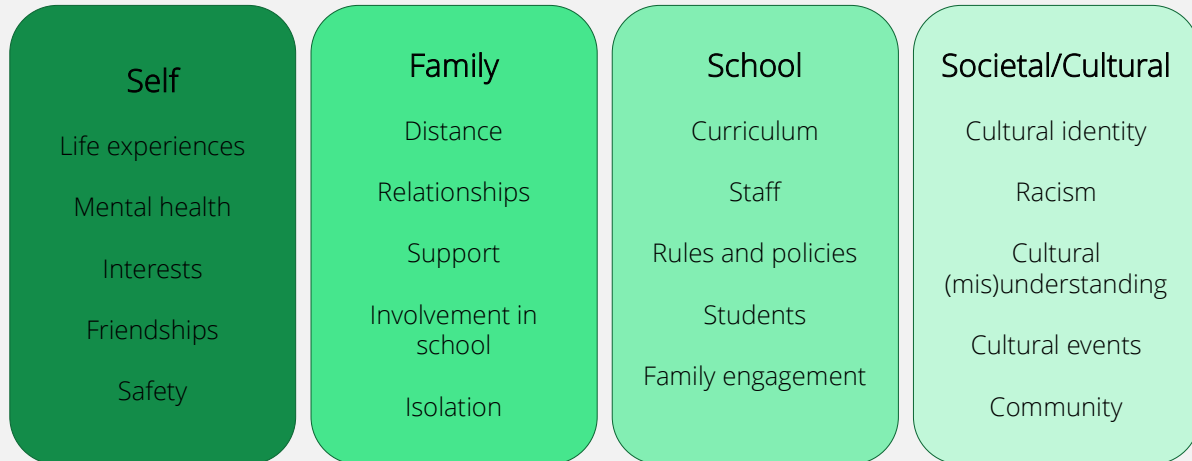
## Stage 3 Data Collection

Students had lived in 21 different countries prior to coming to Australia



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The resilience of students from refugee backgrounds was affected by:

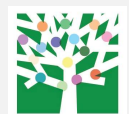


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## Key supports in schools: Curriculum

Flexible curricula which were adjusted to suit students' prior educational experiences and English language abilities were valued:

She gave me modified work. Because I got a C on my first test and she was like 'Are you okay? If you need help, I'll help you out'. And I was like 'Can you give me easier stuff with easier English?' And she was like 'Sure I'll give you modified stuff.' When she stopped giving it to me that's when I started getting D's on my tests.



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## Key supports in schools: Curriculum

Recognition of home or other languages was valued by students:

I could've gone to another school near my area, however I chose this school because I knew it gives opportunities to speak two languages ... improve myself; that was really good.

But this was only supported in a small number of schools; with little recognition of students' fluency in other languages:

Q: When you, if you come into a space like the EALD classroom is this somewhere that you would be able to speak Arabic quite comfortably?

A: No-

Q: No?

A: No we speak English here.

Q: Okay.

A: Even though, even though the teachers as well encourage us to speak English. So when they hear us speak in Arabic they say practice in English



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## Key supports in schools: Curriculum

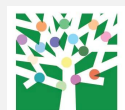
Refugee students' noted the general lack of culturally relevant material within the curriculum.

When schools did attempt to address this by bringing in external speakers to run workshops, students questioned the authenticity or relevance of this information:

F: We've had some people come in and talk about racism or racial issues and in the sense of poetry as well sort of getting your experiences out there using the things you have at school.

Q: Do you think those workshops and things make a difference or hard to know?

F: I mean that's kind of hard to know because you don't really see much of a difference because it's usually you whose experienced something ... the people that are doing it [haven't]



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# Key supports in schools: Policy

Strict uniform policies enforced in some schools conflicted with students' cultural or religious identities:

F: No you can only wear a scarf-  
 F: I know 2 girls when they catch the bus with us, they wear [hijab] and everything on the bus and then when they get stop, on the bus stop, they get off-  
 F: And they have to take it off-  
 F: Yeah, they have to take it off, like they can't come to school-

Many students had experienced bullying or racism based on their culture or language:

I'm in EALD for maths/science and those types and some people make fun of us just because we're not really good at English and English is our second language or third; it's just sad, we haven't been that much long in Australia, that's why they think EALD are the stupid class in the grade and stuff, yeah they think that.



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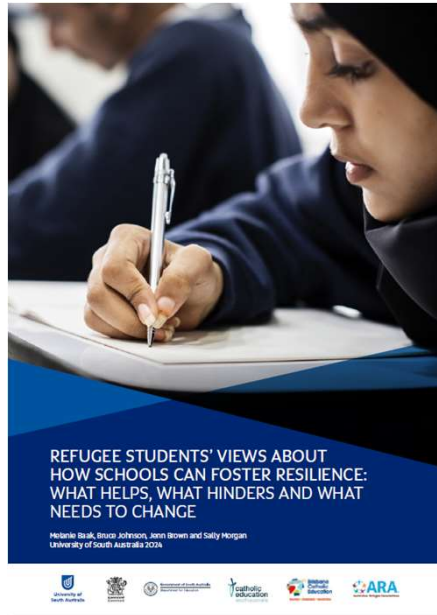
## Phase 3 key findings



Personal History & Wellbeing	Relationships	Cultural & Religious Issues	Racist Attitudes & Behaviours	School Rules & Administrative Procedures	Targeted Support	Curriculum & Assessment
<i>Personal history and wellbeing</i> refers to the forced migration life events students have experienced and how these impact on their welfare post settlement.	<i>Relationships</i> refers to the social connections and relational interactions students have with significant others in their lives.	<i>Cultural and religious issues</i> refers to the cultural and spiritual aspects of students' lives and how these interact with the school environment.	<i>Racist attitudes and behaviours</i> refers to the students' experiences of prejudiced, discriminatory, or biased actions based on students' race, cultural background or religion.	<i>School rules and administrative procedures</i> refers to the suite of controlling expectations and directions sanctioned by schools.	<i>Targeted support</i> refers to the extra help students receive in their host schools.	<i>Curriculum and assessment</i> refers to the students' experiences of the formal provision of learning and evaluation activities planned and enacted by schools.
Systemic barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing visa and status issues</li> <li>- Family separation</li> <li>- Safety concerns</li> </ul> Bringing full self to school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First language</li> <li>- Happy and sad memories</li> <li>- Holistic understandings of home context</li> </ul> Impacts of safety concerns on schooling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mental and physical health</li> </ul>	Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Caring roles</li> <li>- Investment in education</li> <li>- Navigating complex factors</li> </ul> Peers and friends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Isolation</li> <li>- Rejection</li> <li>- Needing to acquire English to be socially successful</li> </ul> School staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Key advocates and individuals</li> <li>- Being misunderstood</li> <li>- Limitations of staff</li> </ul>	Uniform policies  Staff awareness of culture and religion  School responses and adaptability	Everyday experiences of racism and religious discrimination  Racist treatment from peers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bullying</li> <li>- Targeted and overt racism</li> </ul> School responses to racism  Impacts of racism on refugee students	Appropriate policies and practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Behaviour management</li> <li>- Attendance policies</li> </ul> Inflexible policies and practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lateness</li> <li>- Uniform policy</li> </ul> Inaccessible policies and practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication methods with parents</li> <li>- Canteen and food options</li> </ul>	Bilingual support staff (BSSOs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visibility</li> <li>- Connection</li> </ul> Co-location of intensive English language programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eased transition</li> <li>- Long-term support</li> </ul> Additional material resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School-specific</li> <li>- Community</li> </ul> Holistic support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Orientation process</li> <li>- Wellbeing support</li> <li>- Future planning</li> </ul>	Identity as learners  Language learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EALD support</li> <li>- Place of first language in learning</li> </ul> Culturally relevant curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content</li> <li>- Process</li> </ul> Assessment issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility</li> <li>- Modifications</li> <li>- Speed</li> <li>- Feelings of failure</li> </ul>

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## What does this all mean for EALD teachers?

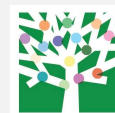


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## Provocations in relation to targeted support

Is EALD and trauma responsive all we need?

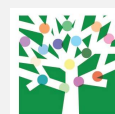
- How can we see beyond trauma and think about more holistically about social, emotional, cultural and educational development?
- How can our school acknowledge and centre the strengths, hopes and future aspirations of refugee-background students?
- How can we participate in an active welcome and the involvement of families and cultural community groups in school activities, events and daily life?
- How can we talk about wellbeing in a broader and more culturally accessible way that captures physical, social and relational/sexual health?
- How can our school and wellbeing team build strong partnerships with external agencies/community groups that offer broader support and programming beyond trauma or mental health?
- How can we reflect and adapt our policies and practices to recognise and directly challenge racism and discrimination?



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## Provocations in relation to curriculum and assessment

- What are the challenges for refugee students to reach equitable levels of academic learning, vocational pathways and wellbeing? Does this look different in primary and secondary schools?
- What happens in our school in relation to holistic language learning and support for other needs and challenges that refugee background students are managing?
- In what ways do we consult with and learn from refugee background students in our school about the kinds of support they view as being most helpful?



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# Questions?



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Refugee Student  
Resilience Study

[www.refugeesatschool.edu.au](http://www.refugeesatschool.edu.au)



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