ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Why school context matters in refugee education

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Abstract

Education plays an important role in the successful settlement and life outcomes of young people from refugee backgrounds. Because of this, research into young people from refugee backgrounds in education systems tends to focus on examples of "good practice" in terms of how these young people experience education. Yet, examples of good practice commonly fail to take into account that schools are engaging in particular practices from very different contexts. This article contributes to the study of refugee education by drawing attention to the role that school contexts play in how different schools enact "good practice". It presents data from a large multi-stage study which explored how the schooling experiences of students from refugee backgrounds are shaped by educational policies and school practices. By outlining case studies of seven schools, it highlights the impact of differing school contexts on how schools respond to the needs of students from refugee backgrounds. In this way, this article highlights that the notion of "good practice" within refugee-background education is always nuanced and contextual.

Keywords Refugee education · School contexts · School-level policy development and enactment

1 Introduction

Researchers in a wide range of fields have been increasingly focussed on the importance of context in understanding people's lives (Bolling et al., 2018; Bösch & Su, 2021; Gu & Johansson, 2013; Harris & Jones, 2018; Rendón, 2014; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). In this article, we explore how contextual factors impact on school practices designed to respond to the needs of students from refugee backgrounds. By contextual factors we mean, in the broadest sense, school characteristics (e.g., school type, ethos, history, size, complexity, staffing profile, curriculum) and student characteristics (e.g., race, class, gender, wealth, language, sexual orientation, ability, geographic mobility) (Gu & Johansson, 2013). In particular, we are interested in how school leaders recognise and respond to the different contextual influences that shape their responses to the educational needs of these students.

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Our central argument is that current research on "good practice" in refugee education does not give due consideration to the role of school contexts and, in turn, the development of policy and funding relating to refugee education also does not consider the importance of school contexts. Our case studies of seven schools demonstrate the significant importance of school context in relation to refugee education and policy enactment in this space.

Braun et al. (2011) developed an analytical framework to identify the contextual factors which influence policy enactment in schools. Described as a heuristic device, the intention of their framework is to reveal how the "rational, organisational, political, symbolic and normative are messily intertwined in 'policy work' in schools" (Braun et al., 2011, p. 587). As Slee et al. (1998) and Sellar and Lingard (2014) highlight, the "bracketing out" of contexts and school performance is a common flaw in policy analyses—for example, analyses of school organisation and pedagogy which ignore material contexts. Braun et al.'s (2011, p. 588) framework considers context in terms of objective and subjective resources across four overlapping and interweaving contextual dimensions:

- situated contexts (e.g. locale, school histories, intakes and settings)
- professional contexts (e.g. values, teacher commitments and experiences, and "policy management" in schools)
- material contexts (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure)
- external contexts (e.g. degree and quality of local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities).

Braun et al. (2011) suggest that analyses which draw on these contextual dimensions can disrupt images of "ideal" school environments as the backdrop to policy enactment by uncovering "the circumstances of policy enactments in 'real' schools" (p. 595). Our analysis illustrates the ways that situated, professional and material contexts particularly shape school practices relating to the education of students from refugee backgrounds.

2 "Good practice" for educating students from refugee backgrounds

Students from a refugee background are identified differently in different countries globally, and even, as our research demonstrated, within schools in Australia. A refugee is routinely defined in policy using the words of the 1951 Refugee Convention as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2010). In this research project, students from a refugee background were identified as those who had come to Australia through humanitarian or asylum-seeking pathways, with a focus on students who had been in Australia for less than ten years. In the absence of specific questions on enrolment forms about refugee status or visa type, the participating schools had varying ways that they identified students from a refugee background. Schools included measures such as English language proficiency, country of birth, languages spoken other than English and knowledge of individual students to identify students whom they thought had a refugee background. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider the complexity and problematics of labelling students from refugee backgrounds; however, this has been considered in other research (see Baak, 2021; Ludwig, 2016).

Literature highlighting "good" practice for educating students from refugee backgrounds has tended to focus on three specific discourses, namely welcoming and non-racist environments, support for students in terms of psychosocial needs and trauma, and English language acquisition (Rutter, 2006; Sidhu et al., 2011). Rutter (2006) argues that, although the literature is moving away from dominant narratives where "children's life experiences are equated with trauma in a manner that traumatises and homogenises them" (p. 5), much good practice literature continues to promote homogenising discourses which fail to account for the fact that refugee background young people come to school with a range of experiences pre- and post-migration.

In reviewing the extensive research on refugee education in countries of refugee resettlement, we have identified six key domains of "good practice" that summarise the range of approaches used by schools to support the education of students from refugee backgrounds (see Baak et al., 2021):

- *School ethos* refers to the values, beliefs, norms and assumptions that influence the ways students from refugee backgrounds are treated in schools (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Bačáková & Closs, 2013; Bajaj et al., 2017; Block et al., 2014; Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Correa-Velez et al., 2016; Morrison & Allen, 2007; Olliff & Couch, 2005; Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Pugh et al., 2012; Sellars, 2021; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).
- *Celebrating diversity* refers to a range of practices that value and commemorate the different cultural traditions and practices of students from refugee backgrounds (Bačáková & Closs, 2013; Bajaj et al., 2017; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Crawford, 2017; Cummins, 2005; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2019; Hek, 2005; Pinson et al., 2010).
- *Targeted support* refers to interventions that address the complex learning, social and emotional needs of students from refugee backgrounds (Baak, 2018; Aveling, 2007; Correa-Velez et al., 2016; Keddie, 2012a; Loreman, 2014; Mansouri et al., 2009; McIntyre et al., 2020; Pastoor, 2016; Woods, 2009).
- *Positive relationships* refers to human connections and social exchanges at school characterised by respect, care and trust (Johnson, 2008; Baak, 2016, 2019; Baak et al., 2022; Cohen, 2013; Morrison & Allen, 2007; Rafferty, 2019; Ungar et al., 2014).
- *Parental involvement* refers to a range of strategies designed to engage parents of students from refugee backgrounds in school-related activities (Cun, 2020; Gandarilla Ocampo et al., 2021; Koyama & Bakuza, 2017; Rah et al., 2009).
- *Community partnerships* refers to relationships between schools and service organisations that support the needs of students from refugee backgrounds (Baak et al., 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Morrison & Allen, 2007; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Woods, 2009).

The dominant focus of "good practices" in terms of educating young people from refugee backgrounds is on holistic approaches which avoid homogenising discourses and focus on the experiences, needs, skills and abilities of individual children. Yet, while the literature on effective school practices advocates contextual understandings of refugee-background students, there is virtually no acknowledgement that schools are differently placed in how they engage in these practices. Below we consider how varying school contexts influence school practices relating to refugee-background students.

3 The study

This article draws on research from a larger, three-staged, Australian Research Council Linkage funded project entitled 'How schools foster refugee student resilience'. The aim of this project is to understand the ways in which schools foster the educational and social conditions which enhance the resilience of students from refugee backgrounds, with a focus on how these students are impacted by particular policies, practices, relationships and events. Here, we report findings from Stage 2 of the project which examined school-level initiatives to support students from refugee backgrounds.

Participating schools were recruited through support from the government and Catholic education sectors in two states of Australia as well as from community groups who work with students from refugee backgrounds. Seven schools were selected based on meeting all or some of a set of criteria for "good practice" in refugee education outlined above. There was no set number of criteria which each school was required to meet. Rather, schools were nominated by staff working within the government and Catholic school departments, usually because they were known for working with young people from refugee backgrounds. The research team then undertook informal conversations with people working in refugee service provision to further ascertain the suitability of the schools for the research. As there are a limited number of schools within the two states that have students from refugee backgrounds, it was not possible for all schools to meet all criteria for "good practice". In addition, as will be illustrated throughout the remainder of the article, what "good practice" looked like in each school was unique to each context.

We used a "focussed ethnography" approach (Knoblauch, 2005) to investigate policy development and enactment. This approach involved two data-intensive visits to each participating school. During the first visit members of the research team undertook interactive walking school tours usually led by the school principal or other relevant school leader. During these walking tours, we took photographs of the physical environments and audio recorded our discussions with school staff. We then conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders at subsequent visits to the schools with a focus on policies of importance for students from refugee backgrounds, policy development and implementation, the role of school staff in enacting policies, and the practicalities of reinforcing or bolstering the resilience of students from refugee backgrounds. In addition, we collected relevant policy texts, and some informal discussions became additional data. In total we interviewed 57 school staff across the seven schools. Participant numbers at the schools varied between 6 and 13. All recorded interviews and discussions were transcribed by a professional transcription company.

For our data analysis, we drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) approaches to thematic analysis, which involved the entire research team engaging with transcripts through reading and discussion in order to develop a thematic coding framework. Data analysis was completed using NVivo 12, with all interview transcripts and other related data coded against the thematic framework. This article draws on this analysis to show how differing contextual dimensions influence the ways schools respond to the educational needs of students from refugee backgrounds. In presenting the findings below we use pseudonyms for all names and have generalised and approximated some data to reduce the risk of identifying school sites and individuals.

4 Contextual influences on refugee education

Drawing on the framework developed by Braun et al. (2011) to understand key components of school contexts, we now illustrate how the components of situated contexts, professional contexts and material contexts influence policy enactment and school practices specifically in relation to refugee education. The component of external contexts identified by Braun et al. (2011) was not one which teachers and school leaders in this study identified as strongly influencing school practices in refugee education; as such it is not considered here. While other research examining the importance of school contexts has focussed very specifically on how context influences the enactment of various education policies within schools (see e.g. Braun et al., 2011; Keddie, 2013, 2014, 2019), the first phase of this research project reported on elsewhere (see Baak et al., 2021, 2022) sought to identify and analyse the policies that informed refugee education in state and Catholic jurisdictions in two Australian states. We identified no refugee-specific policies and only minimal reference to refugee students specifically in English as an additional language policies, wellbeing policies and inclusion policies. When interviewing the 57 school staff, almost all staff identified not being aware of any policies that specifically related to refugee-background students. This meant that, rather than explicitly considering how policies were enacted, we instead identified current school practices, which were perhaps very loosely informed by policies relating to refugee education, but it was not possible to directly identify how specific policies were being enacted. Nonetheless the heuristic identifying the importance of school context in policy enactment is also useful in understanding how school practices in relation to students from refugee backgrounds are shaped by school context.

4.1 School contexts

In this section, we outline the situated contexts of each of the schools within the study, including school histories, intakes and settings, in order to contextualise how each of the schools engage in good practice in terms of refugee-background students, while still ensuring the anonymity of the schools. Table 1 summarises several key metrics across the seven participating schools.

4.1.1 School 1

School 1 is a centrally located Catholic single-sex school catering to approximately 1200 girls from 3 to 18 years old. The school has a strong social justice focus with an ethos and practice of supporting refugee education dating back to the 1970s. This school identified approximately 100 students from refugee backgrounds, with some of these identified as "second-generation" refugees who were born in Australia but whose families had come to Australia as refugees. While this is problematic from a range of perspectives, including how this label became racialised (i.e. Black and Muslim students were being identified), as well as temporal aspects relating to how long a person should continue to be considered a refugee, it is beyond the scope of this article to consider this identification in further detail (see Baak, 2021 for a discussion of this issue).

Table 1 Summary of school key metrics

School	Sector	ICSEA* value (national average = 1000)	Students in bottom and top quartiles SEA**	Students with language background other than English
School 1	Catholic	1080	10% and 45%	20%
School 2	Public	980	40% and 10%	55%
School 3	Public	890	75% and 1%	20%
School 4	Public	930	60% and 10%	70%
School 5	Catholic	1000	30% and 10%	10%
School 6	Public	890	75% and 1%	75%
School 7	Public	950	50% and 5%	20%

*Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), a numeric scale developed to indicate the average level of educational advantage of each school's student population relative to those of other schools (ACARA, 2014)

**Socio-educational advantage (SEA) is calculated through the statistical modelling of family background data associated with student achievement in literacy and numeracy. Students in Australia are distributed evenly across four quartiles representing disadvantage in the bottom quartile to advantage in the top quartile

4.1.2 School 2

School 2 is a multi-campus co-educational government secondary school, located around 10 km from the central business district, which was established approximately 10 years ago. In 2019, the school's enrolments numbered around 1,300 students. This school was unable to provide data on the number of students from refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds.

4.1.3 School 3

School 3 is a co-educational government secondary school in a low-income outer suburban area. In 2019, the school had a total population of approximately 1,100 students. The total number of students within the school from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds was around 140.

4.1.4 School 4

School 4 is a co-educational government secondary school close to the central business district, with a catchment area characterised by increased gentrification in recent years. In 2019, the school catered to around 775 students. The school has a history as a specialist English language learning site. At the time of the interviews, approximately 200 students were categorised as either from a refugee background or as asylum seekers.

4.1.5 School 5

School 5 is a Catholic co-educational secondary school with a focus and long history of specialist supports for students with disabilities. In 2019, the school had an enrolment of just over 400 students and the enrolment data showed that just over 40 of these were from refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds.

4.1.6 School 6

School 6 is a co-educational government secondary school located in a low-income outer-suburban area with a population of almost 1,400 students in 2019. The interview data suggested that, although 62% of students had technically met the requirements for EALD support, unofficial estimates of need were closer to 80%. Students from refugee backgrounds or asylum-seeking students made up approximately 25% of this cohort.

4.1.7 School 7

School 7 is a co-educational government secondary school located in a regional town with a significant number of refugees resettled through the Humanitarian Entrant program. In 2019, the school had almost 1700 students enrolled, and of those around 25% spoke English as an additional language or dialect; however, the school had no specific data on how many students were from a refugee background.

4.2 Situated contexts: School histories and student intakes

Through engaging Braun et al.'s (2011) framework, we examined the situated contexts of the seven schools within the project. We considered how aspects such as school intakes and school histories contribute to the material conditions which shape how students from refugee backgrounds experience various school settings. At School 1, the school principal spoke about the school's long history of working with young people from refugee backgrounds which dated back to working with students displaced by conflict in Vietnam and Cambodia. They described experiences working with students from various refugee locations in the Middle East and Africa over the ensuing decades that were shaped by major humanitarian intakes by the Australian government.

In contrast, other schools' experiences of educating students from refugee backgrounds were more recent. The deputy principal at School 6 explained that, from the mid-2000s, the local area experienced "significant growth" and the school was "having really serious conversations around the number of refugees coming into the area" (Katrina, School 6). Similarly, the principal at School 4 said that the arrival of refugee-background students in the school during previous decades was welcomed as the local area, and in turn the school, had experienced a significant population decline. For some schools, refugee-background students had only been enrolled very recently such as at School 5, which was better known for its high intake of students with disabilities. The principal recalled that an inquiry from a parent of refugee-background children had led to the enrolment of 43 students of refugee background in the year prior to our visit, making up approximately 10% of their student cohort. Similarly, School 7 experienced a large intake of refugee-background students from African countries from around 2015, due to shifts in federal government policies relating to regional resettlement.

Schools' experiences with refugee-background students can have an impact on how they perceive and respond to students' various needs. School 1, which has been working with refugee-background students for over fifty years, holds an institutional memory (Kinsella, 2020) around the kind of work that is done in this area in terms of outreach and advocacy, particularly in relation to students from a refugee background. Skills and expertise have been developed over time amongst teaching and support staff as well as

school leaders—they know what supports are beneficial for this group and how best to connect with families and communities. Their policies and practices have been developed over time and they have built knowledge and networks with external settlement support services. In contrast, for schools which have enrolled students from refugee backgrounds more recently, policies and practices that address the needs of their students are still evolving.

As highlighted at the beginning of this section, there was a general absence of refugee-specific education policies in the schools we visited. With an absence of centralised policies relating to refugee education, schools without the institutional memory are struggling to develop these policy and practice knowledges. In the absence of institutional memory, schools were often aware of the need to develop an informed approach to their practice relating to refugee education. While it is possible for schools which have recently arrived refugee-background students to rapidly develop good practices that are led by research-informed, systemic policy advice, this was rarely the case. For example, while staff at School 1 expressed pride in their inclusive practices, much of the discussion centred around historical aspects of their refugee work. In contrast, leaders at School 2 were less experienced with refugee-background students and recognised their lack of institutional knowledge and so would invite community members to speak to staff about many of their students' experiences and to share their cultural knowledge. It was their lack of history and experience of refugee support that meant that they sought to make important connections with local refugee communities:

> I guess when we've had big groups of refugees arrive in Australia, and then we find them in our schools, we have had speakers come in from the community to give us a cultural understanding of the community. So, that's actually been helpful, but we haven't done that recently. I'm aware that we're about to get a lot more Syrian refugees, and that might mean we'll get in someone from the community to talk with our teachers. (Principal, School 2)

While this community-informed practice and information seeking was important and helpful, it would be strengthened by a research and policy-informed approach that enables a more systematic response.

Processes of student recruitment for both refugee-background students and the wider school population illustrate how the situated contexts impact on school practices relating to refugee-background students. At School 1, refugee advocacy was a source of pride which resulted in teachers and leaders positioning students from refugee backgrounds in terms of "value adding" to the experiences and well-rounded education of non-refugee-background students attending the school. The vast differences in socio-economic status and social class at this school meant that the refugee-background students were positioned in terms of how the school community was supporting them: "local families have told me they feel they're making a contribution by their fees will be also supporting refugee students" (Principal, School 1). There was a sense that the contribution of school fees provided parents with the opportunity to add value to their children's school experience through interactions with diverse "others". Butler et al. (2022) have similarly discussed how parents in socio-economically advantaged schools come to embrace aspects of diversity which are viewed as "an asset to their white middle-class, socially progressive identities" (p. 202). However, this is problematic in the positioning of refugee students and their families as disadvantaged others in need of help, and may also result in perceptions of these students as a drain on school resources. These deficit perceptions have implications for students' experiences at school.

Schools with existing cultural and linguistic diversity, which was further enhanced by the refugee-background students in the school, demonstrated pride in the multicultural identities of their schools and saw refugee-background students as subsumed within this multiculturalism. However, the risk in this was the negation of the specificity of refugee experience as well as the diversity of intersecting cultural, racial and classed backgrounds—especially when there was widespread disadvantage in the school such as low socio-economic status. At School 2, for example, there was an assumption that the large number of different identities and cultures negated the existence and risk of racial tensions:

Interviewer: So, with all the different cultures in the school and the different backgrounds are there ever any tensions, or how would you describe how everyone gets along?
School staff 1: Certainly, from my perspective there aren't any – there really aren't.
School staff 2: There isn't.
School staff 1: What is wonderful about the school is there are so many cultures and that they are just all out there, and they just get along. We have Aboriginal students – how many cultures have we got here?
School staff 2: I said it's 72 – it's probably today.

This subsuming of diversity of experience was also visible at School 3, where the principal suggested that high levels of disadvantage within the school community effectively brought students together. Furthermore, viewing all the students as disadvantaged appeared to have led to a "no-excuses" attitude regarding different student experiences:

We value them and I don't put up with any crap from them, so a lot of kids that come through, they're really enabled because people are like, "oh, you poor thing, you've got a disability". It's like, nah, that's who you are, get on with it. And so, we give them a sense that they are actually capable of doing things and that we're not going to actually let them get away with it. (Principal, School 3)

The concern about a "no excuses" attitude is the increased risk that refugee-background students at these schools will not be given access to the important supports they need, particularly in terms of language learning support and learning to live in a new country after forced displacement. Attempts to treat students equally can mean refugee-background students are seen as just like everyone else, which may overlook the specificity of the refugee experience. This attitude was less prevalent at School 7, where the principal spoke about the importance of refugee-background students having access to the "EALD building", where students were separated out from the main part of the school:

I think it's important because it does give them a chance just to be here without the rough and tumble of being in the middle of the school. And they can be here and find their feet; they don't have to go into the rest of the school if they don't want to. They can find their feet, develop friendships, and then once they've got their bearings, then they go off to the canteen and all the other different places around the school. So, I think my personal opinion is it's better for them to be off to the side rather than in the middle, where there's the whole of the school going around them all the time or going through and then just becoming disorientated. (Principal, School 7)

For the students of refugee background at this school, the EALD building was a positive transitional space and resource which they returned to throughout their schooling. Furthermore, the EALD building was indicative of the role of schools' contexts because, due to the regional location, students from refugee backgrounds did not have the option of attending

an intensive English language school before moving to a mainstream school, as is the experience of some students in city and suburban schools. Instead, their initial site for support was co-located within the mainstream school and remained a source of support in the long term.

4.3 Professional contexts: school values and ethos

How schools define themselves in terms of values or school ethos can play a role in how they engage in good practices for educating refugee-background students. All of the schools spoke about their inclusive practices as an aspect of their values or ethos, which were embedded in the day-to-day life of the school. For some schools, these practices revolved around recognising and celebrating diversity. In response to the Christchurch Massacre in New Zealand, School 2 began celebrating Harmony Day with food and dance performances. Harmony Day is an Australian celebration coinciding with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, although it has not traditionally been a day for discussing racism. School 2 highlighted Harmony Day as an example of their values and focus on diversity:

> one of our school values – even though it's technically not a value – diversity, right – was a focus for us so we wanted that – we wanted to have the conversations that we value that, and we celebrate it. So, it's not tolerated – it's at a higher level we think.

Other schools focussed less on diversity and more on inclusivity and outreach in terms of a religious ethos and values. The religious focus of School 5 and School 1 meant there was a long history of outreach and support both internally and within the local community. The School 1 leaders discussed their extensive support and advocacy for students from refugee backgrounds. At School 5, where the ethos was based similarly on inclusion and outreach, the principal spoke about a history of inclusiveness due to the school's high percentage of students with disabilities: "this school's always been known for its inclusive education practices. So, part of the context is we've got about 39%, I think, students with a disability. So, there's a story of caring in the community that's well known." Being schools outside of the government systems, School 1 and School 5 were able to make choices about student enrolment so that part of their narrative around inclusivity and outreach includes their decision to enrol students from refugee backgrounds. Perhaps as a result of "bringing in" students, inclusiveness was somewhat synonymous with "sameness" in the sense that it sought to make differences between students invisible, even though in these two schools most refugee-background students were hypervisible due to wearing a hijab or having non-white skin in schools that were predominantly white. For example, the principal at School 5 suggested "including someone because they've got a disability or because they're a refugee is the same thing". Equating inclusion on the basis of ability or refugee experience is problematic as it ignores the specificity and distinction between the educational needs and assets of these individuals. In addition, there can be compounded needs, for example, if a refugee-background student also has a disability. At School 1, the principal said that some students had been surprised to discover there were over one hundred students of refugee background in their school. When asked where these students were, the principal told the students, "Well, that's the point; they're you and me." School leaders at these schools use the rhetoric of "sameness" which obscures the impossibility of these students really being the same due to their life experiences and contexts, educational and linguistic backgrounds.

Participants from most of the other participating schools, particularly schools with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, similarly spoke of "sameness" between refugee students and other students. However, within these schools, sameness represented an assumption that all disadvantages are equal. For example, at School 3, the principal spoke about how the social demographics of the school meant that the majority of students were overcoming challenges:

> What's really interesting about a … school like this is that if you look across our entire demographic within the school, by and large you'll find students everywhere that have some type of difficulty or challenge that they're trying to overcome. And as a result of that you don't get divisions between kids, so a student that might be sitting there will be dealing with this issue in their life and a student that's sitting here will be dealing with that.

Within schools that cater for large populations of students from a diversity of marginalised backgrounds, there is a temptation to lean into homogenising discourses where different challenges are viewed as equal, with similar levels of resilience or support needed to overcome them. Yet, the homogenising of marginalisation overlooks the fact that different students may come to school with multiple and intersecting experiences and challenges, such as experiences of racism *and* low socio-economic status or having an interrupted education *and* being an English language learner.

A holistic view of inclusion is an important feature of school environments in the good practice literature (Baak et al., 2019). How school leaders and communities understand inclusion and engage with inclusive behaviours can look different depending on the school context. The staff at some schools were more aware that inclusion may differ depending on context. The principal at School 7 explicitly discussed their concerns that their efforts toward inclusivity were superficial or surface-level actions:

> So, despite all the superficialities, which are all good, it, if I've got a lady, Claire, who's an Indigenous worker down in the teacher aide room does she feel totally accepted, included, or does she only feel that because she behaves as she knows she's expected to behave in this culture? If she would like to come in dressed like that because that's, would that be frowned on? Would that a breach of whatever or and so that's a journey I'm on in terms of authentic inclusion and a lack of racism within the school.

Miller et al. (2018) highlight the importance of school cultures in terms of the ways they reflect "the attitudes and actions of school communities, and the ways in which these affect feelings of welcome or belonging, or otherwise, in staff and students" (p. 343). How different schools are placed to respond to differing needs of their refugee-background cohort can depend a great deal on how schools' values and ethos are reconciled in practice.

4.4 Material contexts: Staffing, budgets and funding

For the schools in this study, material contexts such as budgets and staffing played a key role in how they engaged in good practices in terms of refugee-background students. At School 2, the school counsellor was viewed as an asset to the school due to her long-term experience, though it was not clear whether she had any specific training in working with refugee-background children.

Interviewer: And, amongst your student counsellors, are any particularly trained or
knowledgeable, say, about the refugee experience and/or refugee students?

School staff: Well, so, I'm not sure that they're necessarily trained in that, but certainly, Car-
rie has been counsellor at this school since its inception, and she has a lot of
experience in working with a lot of girls from a refugee background.

Participants from other schools noted a specific desire to hire staff who would be able
to meet the needs of refugee-background students from different cultural backgrounds.
The focus at all the schools was on employing support staff to meet the needs of refu-
gee-background students, rather than on seeking teaching staff from cultural and linguis-
tic backgrounds that reflected the backgrounds of the students. For example, teacher aides
at School 6 were hired based on specific skillsets, like speaking the language of students
within the school cohort. However, School 6 had also been able to engage a staff member
who was funded by a non-government settlement organisation who was able to offer strong
support to refugee-background students regarding settlement:

So, one of the reasons Tanya is here is because it means that there's that ready access.
Because sometimes what has happened in the past is kids have had a need, we've
rung and by the time it's gone through the triage process or the intake process possi-
bly the situation's become really serious. Whereas with Tanya here, even if she's not
the young person's case worker, she's able to link them in straight away, which has
made a huge difference to our service delivery.

Similarly, at School 1, community organisations and the Catholic ministry group associated
with the school appeared to be providing much of the support for students of refugee back-
ground. Other schools that were more autonomous in terms of staffing sometimes grappled
with challenges such as funding and understanding the varied needs of their students.

School 4 was working towards hiring staff who would meet the needs of their particular
students. At the same time, it struggled to navigate funding systems to best support students,
especially those who were applying for asylum or going through the settlement process:

The numbers are a bit confusing because refugee or refugee-like students, those stu-
dents are the ones that are recognised within the funding. So, the funding doesn't
necessarily count all of the students with refugee backgrounds and the funding has
changed in the last few years.

Insecurity around shifting funding models and availability of funding for refugee-back-
ground or "refugee-like" students created employment constraints. In addition, staff from
a number of schools discussed that they often received little notice from settlement agen-
cies before refugee-background students arrived at their school, sometimes in significant
numbers, which made preparing in terms of staffing and resourcing difficult, particularly
for those schools without significant discretionary funds at their disposal. While all schools
tackled issues around how students at different stages of settlement with different visa types
were funded, more highly funded schools were often better placed to absorb these costs.

Budget and funding structures appeared to play an important role in how schools sup-
ported refugee-background students. School 5 was highly funded due to both school fees
and federal government funding due to formulas within the Schooling Resource Standard
that provided additional funding loadings for the high number of students with disabili-
ties at the school (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022). As such, this
school was able to provide students from refugee backgrounds with their uniforms and
equipment for free, including expensive laptops: "Well part of our fees is we provide them

with a MacBook, and they love it because – all the kids love it – it's like their own thing and they look after them really well." This school was also able to offer fee remission to refugee-background students, particularly in the initial years after their arrival in Australia. Furthermore, while some schools experienced difficulties accessing staff, School 5 sometimes struggled with a staff oversupply:

> One of the other challenges is because your staff are normally on numbers of students. There is formulas around that, but because we get so much student with disability funding we've got all these extra staff and it's where to put them because of the formulas for buildings would only expect only 40 teachers for a school this size and we might have 70 so there's challenges around that.

The school was also able to fund interpreters on their staff in response to their specific cultural intake – this included considering the different dialects spoken by their students. The presence of interpreters facilitated a greater sense of ease and closer relationships between the local community and the school, which is an important aspect of supporting students from refugee backgrounds across multiple domains (Pinson & Arnot, 2010; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Funding enabled School 5, and others within the study, to engage in best practice in a way not necessarily available to schools with more uncertain and constrained funding.

5 Conclusion

Discussions of good practice with students from refugee backgrounds often fail to account for how schools are differently placed to both engage with and enact particular practices. Furthermore, there is little understanding about how the discourse of "good practice" interacts with individual schools and their differing resource environments. Ball et al. (2011) highlight that school context "is a mediating factor in the policy enactment work done in schools—and it is unique to each school, however similar they may initially seem to be" (p. 40). As this research has demonstrated, although not necessarily outlined as policy, the way that schools respond to the needs of students from refugee backgrounds is strongly contextual.

How the contextual aspects of schools and their work with refugee-background students are intertwined is revealed through employing analytical tools as outlined by Braun et al. (2011). We have shown that the situated, professional and material contexts impact on how "good practice" is enacted. Advantages in terms of situated factors can shape how schools approach advocacy and inclusion practices; professional factors can influence the positioning of students of refugee background within a school; the material factors of funding and staffing often allow for targeted support; and the intertwining nature of these contextual factors enables, or at times undermines, the provision of a holistic view of inclusion and cultural diversity. While school context is important, equally the diversity and context of refugee-background students themselves is a further important consideration (Keddie, 2012b; McIntyre & Abrams, 2020), which is beyond the scope of this article. Further research should more deliberately draw attention to the student body context.

The contextual factors of schools attended by refugee-background students are often overlooked, with an assumption that good practice in refugee education looks the same everywhere. Over a decade ago, Matthews (2008) described the approach to refugee education in schools as "piecemeal", and today we still see a system which lacks policies or a

systemic approach which can be tailored according to the contextual influences of individual schools and students. Our research illustrates that the situated, professional and material contexts of schools are essential dimensions which influence, inhibit and enable the enactment of "good practice" in refugee education. A consideration of these contextual aspects is crucial in the development of policy and funding models in refugee education.

Declarations

Conflict of interest No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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