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**EDUCATING ADOLESCENT UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES:
CURRENT PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS COMPLEX
LEARNING NEEDS**

by

Eric M. Cahan

Accepted in Partial Completion
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Educating Adolescent Ukrainian War Refugees:

Current Practices and Recommendations to Address Complex Learning Needs

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Eric M Cahan
June 2023

Abstract

This research is important due to the thousands of Ukrainian war refugees seeking their education in the U.S. with limited English language proficiency and having likely experienced some ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) leading many to have some levels of trauma. This reality has resulted in MLL (Multi-Language Learner) educators needing support to identify effective classroom approaches. This qualitative research took a phenomenological approach utilizing constant comparison methods and triangulation to code the data and come to conclusions and recommendations. The results of the data show a need for a trauma screener for Ukrainian war refugee students, as well as a method to train teachers on trauma-informed teaching methods and mental models. Also, developing a partnership with community resources to help support these students is recommended. Relationships with the Ukrainian students is important to support these students. Teachers also need professional development for implementing an effective MLL program, including good basic instruction, and for partnering with colleagues who have MLL students in their courses. Furthermore, the data shows Ukrainian war refugee youth experiencing a painful acculturation due to their experiences in the Ukraine and this has resulted in an active push-back against learning English. This reinforces the value of positive relationships with the MLL students. Lastly, administrators and teachers need to each own their roles in the education of MLLs for leadership cohesion and more effective implementation of the MLL program. Additional areas of study are identified including student voice, professional development, and coherent leadership.

Acknowledgements

I cannot state how much I appreciate the help of my family and friends who supported me through the dissertation process. Without the first doctoral cohort in WWU's Education Department history I don't know if I would have finished. I certainly wouldn't have had as much fun as I did.

I want to thank my brilliant, supportive, and hysterical wife, Andrea Cahan, and my loyal, tolerant, and dedicated doctoral supervisor, Dr. Don Larsen. Without you both, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my Ukrainian refugee students.

May you find peace.

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CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Standing in the hallway welcoming and encouraging students has been one of my favorite parts of being a principal. It seems simple from the outside but establishing relationships and getting to know kids as people (and them getting to know you as a trusted adult), can be difficult from the principal's chair. Over the years I found that, if I am consistently present in the hallway, the kids who pass by will learn to trust me and, over time, relationships build. Unfortunately, I typically acquired this awareness only when leaving a position through sentiments conveyed by a student or a parent in a note or a passing comment. A handwritten note from a student might say, "You were always there for us," or "I always felt safe knowing you would be there." A parent might write in a card or email, "Thank you for noticing my child—they said you commented on how nice they looked today. It meant the world to them. You do make a difference." or, "Thank you for coming to our child's swim meet. We can tell you care."

These reaffirming reminders on the value of simply being present with the students are some of the greatest rewards an educator can receive. Another benefit of being present in the halls is seeing teachers. While they are often in a rush to go to the office between periods or just going into their preparation period, there is always a friendly exchange and sometimes even an opportunity to catch up on work-related matters or talk about family and friends.

One day as I stood in my usual spot between the office and the stairs that led to the English Department, I could see Joan Angeles, a usually bright and sunny teacher, walking towards me. I saw she did not look happy. She was not angry either but frustrated. Little did I know the story she was going to tell me would change the direction of the school's academic focus and highlight the gaps in our district's educational plans. Her frustration stemmed from one child, Dennis, whom she described as a Ukrainian refugee, recently placed into her English 7

class, and who had very limited English language skills, including no understanding of the English alphabet or sight words. She described the heart-breaking experience of having to watch him each day with very little, if any, understanding of what was going on. She needed help. I asked her to come by my office later and we could contact the Teaching and Learning Department to get some specific recommendations. We were both hopeful as she returned to the classroom, and I returned to the office.

The next day we met in my office and made the call to the Teaching and Learning Department. To our disappointment, we learned that the plan for introducing new-to-country students was limited at best. The advice offered was more about social-emotional support than academic improvement and supporting kids who were multi-language learners (MLLs). The advice began with just welcoming the students to class every day and asking them to do the same. Joan was visibly frustrated, and I did not have much to say because I shared her view that the answer was inadequate. The meager strategy suggested did not seem to offer enough support for students who were new to our school, the English language, and our country. The response showed the absence of a plan, rather than an actual one.

The following day, when Dennis was in Joan's class, I made a point of visiting her classroom for the purpose of sitting with Dennis and working to establish some rapport. I asked him non-verbally if I could sit there, and he nodded affirmatively. I tried a few simple greetings and questions, but Dennis clearly was not understanding what I was attempting to communicate. I got out my iPhone and opened the translation app. I scrolled down and was hopeful when I found the Ukraine language translator. I went back and forth with him doing my best to introduce myself and welcoming him to the school and area. He was cooperative but was not

overly interested. After another 10 minutes or so, and with the help of his neighbor, a Ukrainian national who was fluent in English, we had a basic conversation. At the end of the conversation, I asked Dennis if he wanted to learn English. He said no. While surprised, I hid my reaction and asked if we could talk later. He said yes, and then asked for my phone, where he typed, “By the way, I am not Ukrainian. I am Russian.” I was mortified. While I do not think I offended him, by simply assuming what I thought was true, I validated how little I and our school knew about our students, particularly those who may have experienced the worst traumas and who needed the most help, our war refugees.

The reality for both teachers and administrators helping students who are multiple language learners is both an academic and an ethical issue that demands attention if we are truly going to say we support the learning of all students in our public schools. This study provided data on addressing the needs of students who are Ukrainian war refugees.

Background

Since early 2022, Ukraine has dominated international headlines as the people who have resisted an armed invasion by Russia, an offensive whose aim appears to be the overthrowing of the government and subjugating the Ukrainian people. Ukrainians experienced war conditions like this many times in their history. The Ukraine, which means “Borderlands,” has had a history of violent and deadly conflicts (Greenspan, 2022). Beginning in 1037, when the Vikings established rule over the area that was known as “Kievan Rus,” which is primarily modern-day Ukraine, the Ukrainian people experienced a near constant state of disruption in the form of land grabs, war, and political maneuvering (History.com, 2022).

From 1037 until 1708 the land that makes up Ukraine changed leadership at least seven times (www.history.com, 2022), culminating with the Russian Empire beginning to cement the area after defeating King Charles XII of Sweden for control of the region. By 1795, Russia controlled what closely resembles modern Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula. Not long after Russia established control, the Ukrainian people began to see themselves as independent of Russia, declaring they had their own language, culture, and history and called for self-rule (Greenspan, 2022).

By 1917, the Ukrainian Central Rada, a council of elected delegates, proclaimed Ukraine a state within Russia, and a people who “have the right to order their own lives and own land” (history.com, 2022). As a result of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 that led to the dissolution of the Russian monarchy, the Central Rada declared full independence for Ukraine in 1918 and signed a military pact with Austria and Germany. This led to the (Russian Bolsheviks) exiting Ukraine (history.com, 2022). By 1922 Ukraine had become a part of the fledgling Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Greenspan, 2022).

Following World War II, as the Allies sought to rebuild European countries that had been affected by Nazi aggression and occupation, Ukraine and other eastern European nations were forcibly incorporated into the USSR and the Iron Curtain descended. Though Ukrainians maintained a semblance of their ethnic heritage, the government of Ukraine fell under the broader influence of the Kremlin in Moscow. Russian became the “official” language of Ukraine and other countries within the Soviet sphere. The power of the Soviet grip on Ukraine and other eastern European countries began to weaken during the time of Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR’s

final premier (1985-1991). Modern-day Ukraine became a sovereign country with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Greenspan, 2022).

However, after 25 years of relative peace, Russia began new aggressions against Ukraine. The Brookings Institute described the 2014 Crimean Annexation as follows:

Ukraine's Maidan Revolution ended in late February 2014, when President Victor Yanukovich fled Kyiv — later to turn up in Russia — and the Rada (Ukraine's parliament) appointed an acting president and acting prime minister to take charge. They made clear their intention to draw Ukraine closer to Europe by signing an association agreement with the European Union.

By early March, Russian troops had secured the entire peninsula. On March 6, the Crimean Supreme Council voted to ask to accede to Russia. The council scheduled a referendum for March 16, which offered two choices: join Russia or return to Crimea's 1992 constitution, which gave the peninsula significant autonomy. Those who favored Crimea remaining part of Ukraine under the current constitution had no box to check.

The conduct of the referendum proved chaotic and took place absent any credible international observers. Local authorities reported a turnout of 83 percent, with 96.7 percent voting to join Russia. The numbers seemed implausible, given that ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars accounted for almost 40 percent of the peninsula's population. (Two months later, a leaked report from the Russian president's Human Rights Council put turnout at only 30 percent, with about half of those voting to join Russia.) On March 18, Crimean and Russian officials signed the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Crimea to Russia. Putin ratified the treaty three days later. (Pifer, 2020)

With Russian military aggression displayed, it soon became clear that Eastern Ukraine was becoming an active war zone. The Ukrainian child refugee issue came to the attention of the world when Russia began its invasion of the country of Ukraine in February of 2022, due to the mass emigration of Ukrainians (migrationpolicy.org, 2022). The human result of the invasion was a massive exodus of Ukrainian war refugees scattered throughout the world (migrationpolicy.org, 2022). What is significant to educators is that, according to Winthrop (2022), over 90% of the Ukrainian refugees are women and children, and more than 1.9 million Ukrainian children left their country in 2022 in the immediate aftermath of the hostilities with Russia.

According to statista.com (2022), Russia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Belarus, and Slovakia are countries that reported the highest numbers of border crossings out of Ukraine. A total of 16.2 million refugees crossed into these neighboring countries. The United States Department of State (2022) reported the U. S. granted access to over 125,000 Ukrainian refugees in FY2022 compared just over 11,000 in FY2021. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS, 2022) reported that the *United for Ukraine* program, which is government-sponsored but privately funded, has accounted for the drastic increase in Ukrainian refugees. The DHS also reported that 125,000 U.S. families applied to sponsor Ukrainian refugees financially through this program. Most of these refugees are living in the New York City metropolitan area, as well as Chicago, Seattle, Miami, Washington DC, Sacramento, Portland, and Cleveland (Department of Homeland Security, 2022).

Despite the war against Ukraine, little research has been done on how to support students who are refugees. However, some research is available on refugee education in general and will

be reviewed. The literature review includes much research on trauma and educating youth who experienced trauma. The research on trauma-informed practices is critical to understanding why students behave as they do in school.

This study provides educators with an understanding of the underlying experiences and needs of Ukrainian war refugees, as well as the skills, theory, and strategies to support the MLL teacher. The concept of educating English language learners has also been covered extensively by researchers. What has not been covered are the needs of current Ukrainian refugees and the extent to which their needs and experiences are different from those of other refugees. In addition, I encountered a paucity of research on trauma in Ukrainian youth. This is likely due to the recency of the mass exodus by millions of Ukrainians.

By exploring the literature and collecting and analyzing data using this study, it was hoped that the best and most effective approaches for by which to educate and support Ukrainian youth would be found. This study provides school-level and district-level practitioners with effective instructional and systematic organizational practices. The intent of this research was for its findings to benefit teachers by providing applicable pedagogy and strategies that better support students and improve teacher effectiveness.

Problem Statement

The context for this study begins with the unprecedented exodus of Ukrainian adolescent refugees from their country due to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February of 2022, which is the second largest ground offensive since World War II (Osokina et al., 2022). With over 125,000 refugees coming to the United States last year, schools were faced with serving the

learning and social needs of students who have little or no English proficiency, various levels of trauma; and in many cases, culture shock (DHS, 2022).

Since the start of the Ukrainian/Russian war more than half of Ukrainian children left their country (UNICEF, 2022). UNICEF claimed that over 1.8 million students left Ukraine with another 2.5 million displaced in-country. Ukrainian war refugees chose to live in the region that includes King County (metro Seattle), as well as other parts of the Pacific Northwest. As most refugees fleeing Ukraine are women and children, there has been a dramatic rise in the need for educating refugee youth (UNICEF, 2022).

The resulting rise in refugee children highlights the need for the education community to take note of who is enrolling in public schools and their needs. The State of Washington has over 6,600 Ukrainian refugees living statewide. That number, according to King 5 News (2022) increased by more than 1,600 from May to June of 2022. With many of these refugees being school-aged, the problem of how to best educate them has become a concern for public schools unprepared for this influx and the complexity of their needs.

This study sought to identify instructional methods and system-wide structures that could support Ukrainian refugees in schools. Often, refugees arrive at schools that are underprepared for the needs of students who have limited English proficiency or ability to communicate their issues, and who carry some level of trauma and, for many, are fearful about the future. Practically all these refugees left their country due to the invasion and left behind family members and friends, particularly men who had been drafted into the Ukrainian military (Higgins & Joyner, 2022).

A related but previously unexplored phenomenon is that previous waves of immigrants embraced the United States as their new home. However, Ukrainian refugees were uprooted from their homes and cultural ties and hope to return at the earliest opportunity. Thus, other immigrants may have seen learning English as a necessary step to their becoming part of their adopted homeland. Ukrainian refugee students, though, may be resistant to learning language skills that they may perceive as irrelevant in the long term.

The problem this research addressed was the lack of tools available for educational systems that are understaffed and underfunded to address this current influx of refugees and their numerous (e.g., linguistic, educational, and social-emotional) needs. These refugee students lack a fundamental level of support and instruction. Many programs do not have this basic level of support; as a result, students are floundering in an environment that is designed to support English-speaking students or, at best, emerging-level English speakers.

This research explored practices that are already providing learning and socialization opportunities for immigrant students. Using a qualitative approach, the study found additional practices that apply in the classroom and in the larger context of the school district to support Ukrainian refugees. In addition to reviewing and highlighting previously identified and researched strategies that are effective, I conducted a survey of current MLL district-level directors and MLL educators in Washington state to understand these practitioners' perspectives on solutions they are applying in the classroom and school districts. As a part of the survey, participants had the ability to volunteer for an additional interview. The interviews were conducted using Zoom, and the data collected from the interviews were coded through *Taguette* software to develop themes.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to identify effective instructional and systematic approaches to help support the success of Ukrainian refugees in public schools. In less than six months, many schools and districts were faced with a wave of students who had been fleeing their war-torn country for months before arriving in Washington state and were in various states of social-emotional health, had various English-language skills ranging from none to fluency, and presented various levels of commitment to being in America. Many were traumatized by the events of recent months.

Significance of the Study

A significant consideration is that many educators may be facing students with limited English-language skills and are new to the country, state, region, and school. The study's aim was to identify researched and practice-based approaches to support traumatized students and provide educators with pedagogical tools to increase their effectiveness with Ukrainian youth.

The significance of the study is that thousands of Ukrainian adolescents are entering Washington public schools that have various capacities to offer of academic support. Many of these refugee students are burdened with the trauma of war and uncertainty about their country and homes in Ukraine. Many are coping well and thankful to be safe, but even this fact may create survivor's guilt. Most of these students experienced terrifying situations, including questionable transportation situations, being taken advantage of, unstable housing, and worries about their family and friends who are now scattered around the world or still in Ukraine in an uncertain situation. For teens, this situation is detrimental to their mental health (Mills, 2022). The impact on educators is that they are facing a unique student-learning issue that begins with

understanding these complicated students and being able to properly support the complex learning needs of all their students, particularly Ukrainian war refugees.

Limitations of the Study

Researchers considered the circumstances, manifestations, challenges, and solutions related to immigrant students. While the Ukrainian students, who are the focus of this study, may fall within the scope of previous research, knowledge of this population is limited and particularly the children who have been affected by the war. The study did not examine online or remote options for educating Ukrainian refugees. Culturally relevant pedagogies should be considered before implementing an MLL program, but they were not considered in this study. Instead, this study provided realistic pedagogical strategies that educators can use to teach students who are refugees from Ukraine.

Research Questions

The research questions include an examination of what is currently known about the experiences of refugees and the impact of their status on their mental health. I examined relevant research about trauma and trauma-informed practices. The work being done in Washington public schools is also examined in the context of MLL programs and the methods utilized and needed to support Ukrainian refugee students. The research questions are:

1. How has the refugee experience impacted Ukrainian students?
2. What efforts have been made by public schools to address trauma experienced by Ukrainian students?
3. How have schools implemented MLL programs to help Ukrainian youth?

4. To what extent, if at all, are the motivations propelling Ukrainian refugees to learn English skills different from those of other immigrant students?

Definitions

Academic English: The English language ability required for academic achievement in situations such as classroom lectures and textbook reading assignments.

Social English: The English language ability required for face-to-face communication, often accompanied by gestures, and relying on context to aid understanding.

English Language Learner (ELL): A student whose first language is not English or who speaks a variety of English, as used in a foreign country or U.S. possession, which is so distinct that ELL instruction is necessary; a student who is now learning English; a student who has not yet attained enough proficiency in English to allow them to profit fully from content-area instruction conducted only in English. The term is interchangeable with MLL or ELL.

ELL teacher: An elementary or secondary teacher who is certified in English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) for the level and subject they teach, and an endorsement as an ESL teacher or bilingual teacher or content-area teacher of ELLs.

ELL teacher assistant: A teaching assistant who works under the supervision of an ELL teacher and an ELL coordinator or administrator. ELL teacher assistants must demonstrate proficiency in English on the state paraprofessional test as well as proficiency in at least one of the predominant languages of the district's ELL student population. Demonstrated training in culturally responsive education practices may be substituted for proficiency in at least one of the predominant languages of the ELL student population.

Former English Language Learner (former ELL): A student who has attained enough proficiency in English to allow them to profit from content-area instruction conducted in English and who has transitioned from an ELL program to a general education program.

Multi-Language Learner (MLL): Multilanguage learners are students with a primary or home language other than English who are in the process of acquiring English. MLL and ELL are interchangeable.

Refugee: A person who has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Response to Intervention (RTI): The practice of providing high-quality instruction and intervention matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and applying child response data to important educational decisions.

Trauma-informed practices: Trauma-informed practices are research-based instructional strategies initiated by teachers in the classroom. They begin with an understanding of how trauma can impact learning and behavior in students. Educators need to reflect on their teaching practices to better reflect ways to support students by reflecting on what their behavior is telling us and implementing practices to address student needs (Understood.org, 2023).

Summary

This chapter included an introduction to the topic that was the focus for the current study. Beginning with an anecdote about an experience that sharpened my sense of how disconnected educators in the U.S. may be from students who are immigrants and, more specifically, from Ukrainian refugee students. I described the exodus of millions of Ukrainians from their

homeland in the wake of the Russian invasion beginning in 2022. I also addressed the problem that informs this study, as well as the purpose of the study. The research questions that guided this qualitative inquiry were presented. Some of the limitations of this research include current information and data regarding the ongoing war in the Ukraine, impacting the people of Ukraine, and access to recent research on trauma-informed practices implemented with Ukrainian youth. The next chapter includes current research regarding the history of Ukraine and the current refugee crisis, the refugee experience, trauma-informed practices, and research on Ukrainian war refugees who are children enrolled in public schools in the United States.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review for this study begins by examining MLL programming, reviews trauma and trauma-informed practices for educators, and relevant research on refugees generally and Ukrainian refugees. Examples of effective practices being implemented in Washington state classrooms and districts are given. I did not consider research on online MLL programs in this literature review due to the lack of recent applicable research. As a result, this study considered in-person models of instruction.

Research about trauma in children provided a context for understanding the experiences of Ukrainian students who fled their war-torn country. Research on educating refugees was conducted to understand past practices that were effective with refugee populations. While there is little research on Ukrainian refugees, identifying past refugee experiences may inform the understanding of effective practices. As this study was performed on instructional skills to support Ukrainian war refugee children, I sought connections between the experience of Ukrainian refugee students, the impact of those experiences, and how educators can support the learning needs of these children.

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

This study used a phenomenological approach to research. A central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality by interacting with their social worlds. Thus, constructivism underlies a basic qualitative study. The researcher does not discover meaning; instead, through an inductive process, the researcher constructs it by concentrating on the following: How participants interpret their experiences; how they construct their worlds, and

what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose was to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The phenomenological approach focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transferred into consciousness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers use this method when interested in 'lived experience' and relates a study of people's conscious experience of their lifeworld (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Across all these perspectives, however, the philosophical assumptions rest on studying people's experiences as they are lived daily, viewing these experiences as conscious (Van Manen, 1990), and arriving at a description of the essence of these experiences as opposed to explanations or analyses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Guillen (2019) described the phenomenology of research as being conducted through empirical (collection of experiences) and reflective (analysis of their meanings) activities. In this sense, the methods are descriptions of personal experiences, conversational interviews, and close observation (Guillen, 2019). Van Manen noted:

The experiences, compiled by the phenomenology and then translated into descriptions, will be effective to analyze the pedagogical aspects in which the educator must be deeply interested in the events that occur in the classroom and optimize the pedagogical practice. In this sense, phenomenology is born from the educational reality. It describes what is essential from the external and internal experience (analysis of consciousness). (2003, p. 5)

Related Literature

Multi-Language Learning Programs: Beginnings and Approaches

In 1971 the issue of educating non-English speaking students emerged in San Francisco when Chinese students in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) sued, claiming the District failed to meet the standards set by the 14th Amendment to the Constitution and the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Oyez, 2023). The lawsuit, presented as *Lau v. Nichols*, began with the integration of 2,856 students of Chinese ancestry, many of whom were not proficient in English, into classes in the District. All classes in the SFUSD were taught only in English and the district offered too few supplemental English courses to accommodate all plaintiffs. The District Court ruled in favor of the District. The plaintiffs appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The Ninth Circuit also ruled in favor of the school district. The U.S. Supreme Court granted certiorari.

The question before the court was, “Does a school district violate the Fourteenth Amendment or the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* when it teaches exclusively in English and fails to provide non-English speaking students with any supplemental English-language classes?” (Oyez, 2023). The U. S. Supreme Court held that the District does violate Constitutional protections when it fails to provide instruction in accordance with students’ English-language learning needs. Associate Justice William O. Douglas wrote for a unanimous court, stating the school system’s failure to provide supplemental English-language instruction to students of Chinese ancestry who spoke no English constituted a violation of the *California Educational Code* and §601 of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Chief Justice Warren Burger, along with Associate Justices Harry Blackmun and Potter Stewart, wrote concurring opinions holding that by depriving these

children of an opportunity to participate in the public education program, the SFUSD had violated both statutory and policy protections. Blackmun, along with Burger, added that if only a few children spoke a language other than English, the Court's decision would not necessarily require supplemental language instruction (Oyez, 2023).

The guarantee of equal access as provided by the Constitution, together with the District's violation of *California Educational Code*, laid the groundwork for what is now commonly known as MLL in American public schools. The *Lau* decision led to MLL programs across the country in public schools. The United States Department of Education (USDOE) defined an MLL student as:

[an] individual who was not born in the United States or whose home language other than English is dominant; or who is an American Indian or Alaska Native and who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on his or her level of English language proficiency. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016)

In practice, after students' English language proficiency is assessed, they are placed in classes based on varying levels and models of support through MLL programming, bilingual programming, or no formal support at all, in which case instruction is conducted entirely in English. Language acquisition and instruction are primarily content based; students learn English in the context of the academic content (Marsh, 2018).

LeSeaux and Galloway (2017) predicted that 40% of the school-age population will be ELL students by 2030, signaling substantial growth that demands attention and response from our educational system. Marsh (2018) indicated:

Educating MLLs in our schools has historically been and is presently a complex challenge that involves the following intersecting realities: a rapidly growing population, a persistent achievement gap, low graduation rates, misidentification for learning disabilities, and increasingly rigorous assessments that place new demands on already struggling MLLs. (p. 2)

Short (2018) wrote that ELLs, “must do double the work in school by learning academic English at the same time that they study the core content areas.”

Orosco and Klinger noted that mis-identifying MLL students as having learning disabilities was a problem in MLL education. This situation is generally due to inadequate teacher preparation as well as teachers who are not using best practices in teaching MLLs and who consequently wrongly assess MLLs for interventions or, conversely, misinterpret a real academic disability as a language proficiency issue and fail to recommend them for special education services (Orosco & Klinger, 2010).

A part of the complex challenge MLLs face is increasingly rigorous standards (Marsh, 2018). U.S. public school policies, beginning with the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB), which called for increasingly rigorous assessments for all students, present a particularly difficult hurdle for MLLs (Marsh, 2018). Short et al. (2018) wrote, “They are not given time to develop their English skills to intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency before they must participate in high-stakes assessments.” (p. 4).

Implementing a range of MLL policies resulted in debates about which is the most effective and appropriate educational approach for MLLs, including transitional bilingual education and dual-language programs. These debates led to speculation, uncertainty, and a lack

of consensus (Gil & Bardak, 2010). Much of this conjecture and lack of consensus was due to research that found MLLs needed 1.5-5 years to develop English language communicative proficiency (Cummins, 2000). Cummins (2000) reported that academic proficiency takes between 4 to 7 years to develop. These data, according to Marsh (2000), created a “misguided understanding of English language proficiency resulting in prematurely exiting students out of MLL programs—once they have acquired communicative proficiency only, after which point, they are assessed academically as if they are not a new language learner anymore.”

This is particularly relevant for Ukrainian war refugees due to their experiences and psychological and language barriers. They are entering a system that is already taxed, and entering classrooms where systems are generally unprepared for students with such complex needs, including introducing trauma-informed practices and emotional counseling. These needs, of course, are in addition to language instruction.

Researchers and educators developed theories and approaches to address the pedagogical concerns raised by educators. The theoretical perspective on language learning including the seminal work of Cummins (2005) proposing that there needs to be a theoretical framework relating language learning to academic achievement to address some of the confusion and controversy in assessing language proficiency in ESL and bilingual programs.

Cummins (2005) asserted that there is a distinction between an MLL student’s ‘basic interpersonal communication skills and their “cognitive-academic language proficiency.” Cummins further identified the *dual-iceberg theory* of dual language, which is that there is a commonality between all language learners (and users) and that “common underlying proficiency” is the intersection of the MLL’s first language and target language, as long as they

are cognitively able. Another popular theory, Krashen's five principles of language acquisition, is based on five hypotheses that dovetail with Cummins's theories to operationalize new language learning in the classrooms (Marsh, 2018, p.8).

The five hypotheses are:

1. Learning versus acquisition: Humans are genetically programmed to acquire languages; explicit instruction may impede natural language learning.
2. The language monitor: Overemphasizes rules and consciousness over production.
3. Comprehensible input: Messages must be delivered in ways that are understood by the learner and that are slightly above his or her current proficiency level.
4. The affective filter; The learner must feel comfortable enough to take risks in the language-learning situation.
5. The natural order hypothesis—Language acquisition follows a natural sequence, from simple to more complex language.

These five hypotheses inform language acquisition at the instructional level (Marsh, 2018). Krashen's theory is based on Chomsky's notion that the language acquisition device identifies four internal linguistic properties:

1. The ability to distinguish speech sounds from other sounds in the environment.
2. The ability to organize linguistic events into various categories that can be refined.
3. The ability to recognize that only certain types of linguistic structures are possible, and others are not.
4. The ability to evaluate language production to determine accuracy of production (Lavadenz, 2010).

This is critical background, given the intensity and immediacy posed by the language acquisition needs of English newcomers, including Ukrainian refugees.

Marsh (2018) noted that other researchers indicated a “dearth of empirical research on instructional strategies or approaches to teaching content” (p. 9). Nevertheless, even this lack of relevant research related to pedagogy provides support for the present research. The most popular MLL instructional approaches in the U. S. are ESL programming, sheltered English immersion or content-based ESL, newcomer programs, and bilingual programs (Marsh, 2018).

Appropriate instructional elements begin from the premise that good basic instruction in academic core subjects is the most effective approach to supporting MLL students (Marsh, 2018). Instructional strategies that benefit general education and MLL populations emphasize the importance of MLL-specific skills, cultural dispositions, and effective MLL instructional practices. These start with the knowledge that basic MLL literacies constitute important understanding for teachers (Marsh, 2018). Five effective features of instruction for MLLs include comprehensible language input, classroom learning structures, social supports, assessment, and culturally relevant pedagogy (Marsh, 2018). These components are critical for implementing and assessing academic support for new English language learners.

Language acquisition theories were summarized by Lavadenz (2010), who described four essential areas of communicative language theory:

1. Strategic competence: Engaging other competencies to promote production.
2. Sociolinguistic competence: Cultural knowledge informs ways to use language appropriately (e.g., formality, politeness, turn taking, interrupting, asking questions).

3. Discourse competence: The selection, sequencing, and arrangement of oral or written words, structures, and utterances or sentences.
4. Linguistic competence: Elements of language (phonology, lexicon, sentence patterns, and morphological inflections) (Lavadenz, 2010).

There are classroom-based strategies and pedagogy that can be implemented in MLL programs. ‘Total physical response’ (TPR) asserts that students acquire language through physical actions prompted by a command (Lavadenz, 2010). Asher created TPR based on how we learn our first language. When children learn their mother tongue, their parents and caregivers are very physically involved in imparting language. They demonstrate and instruct, and the child responds. No one demands or requires toddlers to speak at all—only to listen and understand, which is comprehension. The result is that we *acquire* our native language rather than learn it as we do additional languages. Therefore, TPR in the context of the MLL classroom creates a neural link between speech and action for the learner (Walton, 2022).

The second theory of language acquisition is the natural approach. Although the term *natural* is used both in the ‘natural approach’ and the ‘natural method,’ there are distinctions between them. Both techniques emphasize foreign-language learning experiences akin to first-language learning in children. The natural method favors repetition, teacher monologues, and accurate production of target language-like forms. The natural approach, however, emphasizes input, exposure, comprehension, and preparedness of learners instead of practice (Toprakt, 2021).

Sociocultural issues are also key to language acquisition. Lavadenz offers five principles, originally posited by Cummins (2005), for teaching language minority students. These are:

Principle 1: For bilingual students, the degree to which proficiencies in language one (original language) and language two (English) are developed is positively associated with academic achievement.

Principle 2: Language proficiency is the ability to use language for academic purposes and basic communication.

Principle 3: For language minority students, developing primary language skills necessary to complete academic tasks is the basis of similar proficiency in English.

Principle 4: Acquiring basic communicative competency in a second language is a function of comprehensible second-language input and a supportive affective environment.

Principle 5: The perceived status of students affects the interactions between teachers and students, and among students. In turn, student outcomes are affected (Cummins, 1991).

Lavadenz (2010) examined effective instructional programs and practices including: sociocultural and constructivist theory; *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP), which I chose not to explore in this study and *Academic Language Teaching*, which uses the idea that language acquisition extends beyond linguistic features and includes academic discourse and register (Lavadenz, 2010).

Each component identified in research for teaching new English language learners is important owing to the complexity of the needs of MLL students. Aspects of second-language acquisition include:

- Using student resources to develop oracy and literacy in English
- Using assessments to ensure English learners receive instruction at the appropriate level

- Oral language development (including pronunciation, phonics, vocabulary, and grammar)
- Teaching the pronunciation for meaning
- Teaching of vocabulary
- Grammar instruction
- Phonics instruction
- Writing instruction
- Identify goals for teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- Technological literacy
- Development of teacher expertise
- Modeling teacher understanding and teacher knowledge. (Lavadenz, 2010)

Trauma

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defined refugees as “people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” (Javanbakht, 2022, p. 1). Refugees share these attributes: Are civilians without self-protection exposed to military and war trauma and have repeated exposure to such trauma; endure immense personal, material, psychosocial, literal, and symbolic losses, including family members and loved ones, homes, socioeconomic standing, and memories; and sustain cumulative psychosocial stress, economic hardship, and lack of resources during the escape from war, and for years after displacement (Javanbakht, 2022).

The impact of these conditions have emotional and physical consequences for refugees and are particularly difficult for children. Turrini et al. (2019) stated that refugees and asylum-

seekers may experience a high degree of psychological distress and have high rates of mental health conditions. Factors to consider concerning Ukrainian children and their behaviors as refugees include age and gender, family, mother's risk factors (abuse, alcoholism, mental health), mother's education, alcohol use by the family, Ukrainian stigma regarding mental health conditions, and the lack of Ukrainian mental health services (Burlaka et al., 2017).

Ukraine is a post-communist country in which an individual child's mental health needs have often been subordinated in favor of collective well-being (Rouhier-Willoughby, 2008). Ukrainian medical schools do not have child psychiatry departments, and child psychiatrists are trained through brief postgraduate courses and internships (SNAPE, 2017). In addition to poverty and lack of infrastructure, Ukrainians with mental health problems tend to avoid treatment services offered by psychiatrists because of stigma, cost, and poor quality of care (Burlaka et al., 2014).

Several risk factors are associated with refugee experiences. Medical conditions from lack of housing, neglect, lack of education, lack of exercise and leisure, malnutrition/hunger, and exposure to infectious disease all contribute to infant morbidity and mortality, congenital diseases, and hormonal changes (Junior, 2022). Exposure to violence during childhood can also increase diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic lung disease. Childhood behavioral problems include severe anxiety, bed-wetting, nightmares, aggressive behavior, and withdrawal from families and communities (Junior, 2022).

While there is no current research available on the current conflict in Ukraine, data suggest the number of Ukrainians experiencing PTSD is consistent with refugee populations in previous conflicts, which has been a third (Javanbakht, 2022). Javanbakht (2022) added that this

number increases dramatically when considering half of Ukrainian refugee children already suffer from PTSD. The United Nations indicated that over 7.5 million Ukrainian children were exposed to the hardships of war.

Junior et al. (2022) determined that wars increase the likelihood of anxiety disorders, PTSD, depression, suicide, and feelings of guilt, anger, sadness, anguish, and loneliness. Ben-Ezra (2022), in a study of PTSD in Ukrainian citizens inside and outside of Ukraine, determined that those now living outside the country, as well as those under the age of 16, females, and those who had experienced a wounded or deceased family member in the conflict were most likely to have PTSD. However, large scale studies of the mental health of adolescents who were impacted by the ongoing conflict are lacking.

In the largest review of mental health among Ukrainian adolescents impacted by the war, Osokina et al. (2022) reported that the prevalence of PTSD varied widely, ranging from 4.1% to 94.9% in other studies. The discrepancy, the authors stated, was due to the limits of the questions in the studies, the location of the participants (i.e., inside or outside Ukraine), and/or the region of Ukraine in which the participant lived (Osokina et al., 2022). This study found the greatest correlation between anxiety and general health was associated with living in a war zone. Furthermore, an adolescent living in a war region or being under the age of 16 is significantly more likely to experience PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Osokina et al., 2022). However, Chaaya (2002), had similar findings to those of Osokina et al. (2022), and cautioned that adolescent refugees are also likely to experience PTSD for an extended time.

Solutions for the mental health issues for refugee students is relatively consistent in the literature. Researchers (Ben-Ezra, 2022; Chaaya, 2022; Javenbakht, 2022) identified the

following approaches: Crisis triage and psychological first aid training for those who work with adolescent Ukrainian refugees; collaborative interdisciplinary teamwork; education about mental health as an issue within Ukrainian refugees; timely interventions and rehabilitation; and virtual healthcare.

Trauma-Informed Practices

Understanding that the students coming to public schools from Ukraine may have experienced trauma in one form or another is essential to provide a learning space that meets their needs. Trauma-informed practices are those designed to address trauma in the classroom. These practices call for specific instructional strategies and an understanding of the theories that underlie trauma-informed instruction.

A critical concept related to trauma-informed instruction is adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs (Sweetman, 2022). An example of an ACE that Ukrainian refugee students may have experienced is community violence (UDHHS, 2022). Sweetman (2022) stated ACEs have life-long negative effects on development in all areas of life. Thomas (2019) concurred, citing ACES as “childhood trauma identified as ‘America’s hidden health crisis’” (Thomas, 2019).

Developing interdisciplinary knowledge to help educators understand the impact of trauma on students’ social, physical, and psychological well-being, as well as how trauma may present itself in students’ school behaviors, is the basis for shifting the mindset of educators (Thomas, 2019). Changing perspectives and building emotionally healthy school cultures requires avoiding seeing students and their undesirable behaviors, from a deficit perspective that magnifies the negative impact on each student of their experiences (Thomas, 2019). Abandoning

this deficit view is critical to establishing classrooms in which all students are welcome, especially those who are experiencing trauma.

The cornerstone to this approach is intentionally building and sustaining meaningful relationships with and between all school stakeholders (Thomas, 2019). Lastly, secondary traumatic stress (STS) can have a negative effect on educators, though the current study did not investigate this phenomenon. Baicker (2020) described STS as emotional distress that arises when someone vicariously witnesses the traumatic experiences of another. Sometimes termed ‘compassion fatigue’, the emotional toll of tending to another’s painful experiences can create real symptoms in caregivers, including teachers (Baicker, 2020). STS may lead to disengagement, decline in work performance, reduced motivation, and mental health symptoms that can extend to educators’ personal lives (Brown, 2022).

Before implementing trauma-informed programs in schools, proper preparation is essential. Trauma-informed curriculum specifically designed for educators was developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration-National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (2015) with the intent of properly preparing educators for teaching youth who have experienced trauma. This content uses three characteristics identified by Thomas (2016): Building knowledge by understanding the nature and impact of trauma; changing perspectives and building emotionally healthy school cultures; and self-care for educators.

Refugee Experiences

Understanding the Ukrainian refugee experience begins by first understanding Ukrainian history. The region that is Ukraine has occasionally been subjugated and frequently engaged in conflict since the Middle Ages (Greenspan, 2022). This resulted in generational trauma that has

been documented as being passed down in families (Bezo, 2015). Since 1037, confrontation has been a regular part of the Ukrainian people's experience. Greenspan (2022) described Ukraine as the breadbasket of Europe, a reality that has led to a revolving series of rulers and conflict by the region's powers (Greenspan, 2022). Between 1037 and 1476, much of the Ukrainian homeland changed hands several times among regional powers including, the Mongols, Lithuania, and Ivan III (Greenspan, 2022). Russia entered the fight for Ukraine beginning in 1654, a period called 'The Ruin', but did not take control until 1708 (Greenspan, 2022). Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, following the end of World War I and the increasing hegemony of Russia in eastern Europe (Greenspan, 2022).

During the 1920s, the Ukrainian people experienced a social education phenomenon known as "sotzvykh". Designed by the Soviets, it was intended to eliminate illiteracy and educate youth from a social education perspective versus the traditionally semi-patriarchal family and school (Dichek, 2022). Sotzvykh controlled the entire life of each child with a properly organized upbringing, which included, "a specific program for implementing the basic principles of modernization of cultural and spiritual life" (Dichek, 2022, p.1). The nature of this policy was rooted in the idea that the "mentally impotent and morally dangerous child" was determined by Russia to need social treatment due to moral delinquency (Dichek, 2022, p. 2).

Between 1932 and 1933, Stalin instituted a genocide in Ukraine with the aim of seeking absolute control of the country, a practice later called "Holodomor" (Ukrainian for "death by starvation") (Dichek, 2022). Bezo and Maggi (2015) investigated the relationship between the Holodomor and intergenerational transmission of trauma. Their findings revealed several mental

health issues associated with the Holodomor, including a survival mode mentality leading to multigenerational trauma (Bezo & Maggi, 2015).

In the late 1930s Ukrainians endured the “Great Purge”, during which Stalin placed anyone perceived as a threat to the Soviet Union, including the country of Ukraine, into labor camps or executed those identified as undesirable (Greenspan, 2022). Not long after the Great Purge, Nazi Germany seized most of Ukraine. One of the worst massacres of World War II was committed outside Kyiv in a ravine called Babyn Yar where 34,000 Jews were killed and buried in a mass grave; the final death toll of Ukrainian citizens was between five and seven million (Greenspan, 2022). Greenspan (2022) considered 1991 as the first time Ukraine was fully independent after its parliament declared independence from the dwindling Soviet Union.

Adding to a population with a long history of traumatic events, the recent Russian war effort, accompanied by the exodus of millions of Ukrainians seeking sanctuary and safety, has created the largest mass movement of civilians since World War II (Rodriguez & Batalova, 2022). The creation of millions of refugees due to Russia’s attack and its history of multi-generational trauma should be a major concern when considering the needs of Ukrainian refugee students. Magos and Margaroni (2022) stated that trauma and stress can come from the refugee experience itself, its cause, and the painful process of acculturation. When identifying refugees’ needs, Magos and Margaroni (2022) highlighted two elements including using human rights-based processes to support the dignity of human life and the right to an education, which is supported by international law.

Summary

The literature review provided research necessary to support Ukrainian refugees in their education in American schools. The literature provided a context for their experience and began with a review of studies on MLL programs and history, trauma and trauma-informed practices, and the refugee experience. The theoretical framework is a phenomenological approach.

The related literature portion reviewed the history of MLL to explain why public school systems are obligated to teach MLL students, as well as the practices and theories that underpin such instruction. Trauma and trauma-informed practices were researched in the context of the refugee experience. PTSD and ACEs were summarized to explain how to support Ukrainian adolescents in public schools. The final section detailed the Ukrainian refugee experience and gave a historical lens through which to view current Ukrainian refugees.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Purpose

In February 2022, Russia began an invasion of Ukraine that triggered the second largest migration of war refugees since World War II. More than eight million Ukrainians fled their country. Over 90% of those who left were women and children, leading to millions of children needing to be educated outside their country. Thousands of those displaced children arrived in the U.S., and many of those came to the state of Washington.

These children arrived in various emotional states, ranging from well-adjusted and thankful to depressed and confused (Magos & Margaroni, 2022). Bezo and Maggi (2015) found that many of these children likely had some level of PTSD. Many of the refugees did not speak any English and needed MLL services. Schools in the United States have MLL programs to support the teaching of English as a second language. This study addressed the complexity of instructing adolescent war refugees within the framework of the refugee experience, trauma, and trauma-informed methods of instruction, as well as general methods of teaching MLLs.

The purpose of this study was to identify instructional methods likely to support the learning of Ukrainian youth in public schools. Due to the war, as many as half of the population of children were forced to flee Ukraine (UNICEF, 2022). Many of these children do not speak English, which is a barrier to their normal development because their limited English language skills impede their learning goals.

Though there is considerable research on numerous facets of MLL, little work has been done on Ukrainian youth and their needs in American public schools. Meeting the needs of these adolescent war refugees begins by knowing each person's story and level of trauma. Using the

lens of traditional language acquisition, U.S. schools already need to address hindrances to the academic progress of immigrant students. However, research suggested that, in developing strategies for teaching Ukrainian refugees, knowing the root social-emotional status underlying each student would be an advisable first step, given various cultural and social challenges such as the inclination of their culture to not support mental health therapies, the prevalence of PTSD, and refugees' experiences of trauma.

Research Design

A phenomenological qualitative design was the framework for this research. This approach, based on giving meaning to data, fits this study well due to the analysis of codification or frequencies of the content material (Guillen, 2019). A phenomenological approach allowed me to describe the educational needs of Ukrainian war refugees through their experiences (Guillen, 2019). I also sought information from educators in the state of Washington who work directly with immigrants, including refugees from Ukraine, and whose professional focus is supporting English language acquisition for these student populations. The perceptions of these educators provided a lens describing both the fundamental issues that Ukrainian refugee students present in school and best practices that school personnel have used to date. In addition, it is important to consider the human side of the study. In keeping with this aspect, the study incorporated life experiences and perceptions of participants using a conceptual formulation or category (Guillen, 2019).

MLL educators in Washington experienced the challenges associated with providing support for adolescent Ukrainian refugees in a personal way. Therefore, a phenomenological approach allowed me explore the perspectives of those who sought to support the learning needs

and other challenges of Ukrainian refugee students. Using a survey designed to collect data about the participants' perspectives, this methodology permitted me to investigate the practices that schools used to facilitate these students' transition to U.S. schools. The survey provided direct answers to MLL theory, pedagogy, and practice aimed at helping Ukrainian refugees. Given the complex psychosocial and learning needs of this population, detailed responses from participants helped me determine their perspective concerning effective strategies and methods that were implemented in schools. While some of the data may be quantifiable, the personal and reflective nature of a phenomenological study made this the right approach for delicate and difficult issues.

In addition to the survey developed for data collection, I interviewed several of the participants, who were selected using purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

“Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). According to Patton (2015):

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that undergird their sampling approaches. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($n = 1$), selected for a quite specific purpose. (p. 264)

As some of those I interviewed may know others with similar knowledge of Ukrainian refugees who are public school students, I also employed snowball sampling. Patton (2015) stated:

You can build the sample as you interview by asking each interviewee for suggestions about people who have a similar or different perspective. This generates a chain of

interviewees based on people who know people who know people who would be good sources given the focus of the inquiry. (p. 298)

In selecting my sample of MLL educators, including teachers and administrators, I identified likely participants by their title designation within the directory of Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). This list identified each district in Washington state and its employees. I sent the district's MLL or ELL director a link to the survey and asked them to forward it to their ELL/MLL teachers.

Participants

This study examined the experiences of Ukrainian refugees as MLL students in the state of Washington from the perspective of educators in the state who have experience developing MLL programs to meet the learning and social needs of Ukrainian refugee students. All participants were directors of MLL programs or active teachers of MLL. I surveyed MLL program directors and MLL instructors. The survey was distributed by email and participation was voluntary. Potential participants were identified using purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I anticipated the sample size to be about 40, including those whom I surveyed and interviewed. The sample included only adult MLL teachers and MLL program directors. The survey instrument required about 20 minutes to complete. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with several participants. These interviews required 30 minutes or more. I transcribed the interview into *Microsoft Word* during the interview. Afterwards they were analyzed and bracketed using *Taguette* software.

Setting

The setting for this research was MLL programs in selected public schools in Washington state. I surveyed MLL educators in middle school and high school (grades 8-12).

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this research was adapted from the open-source survey instrument developed by the Institute of Education Science and called, *The English Language Learner Program Survey for Principals* (Grady, 2014). That instrument surveyed principals regarding 17 domains relating to their perception, knowledge, and awareness of each MLL item (Grady, 2014). Survey participants were asked to select one or more of several responses or provide specific values. Some items required participants to select a best response, which would be best summarized through answers that showed a trend. Some responses used a Likert scale. A narrative response section allowed participants to answer some questions in writing to better describe their perspective (Grady, 2014).

A follow-up interview occurred for those open to an interview on Zoom. The interviews were transcribed. I asked participants 15 questions relating to the research questions. I also used a semi-structured interview format, which let the interviewer ask follow-up questions and encouraged interviewees to elaborate on their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection and Analysis

I selected participants through the OSPI *Education Directory* with an anticipated sample size of approximately 40. The survey was administered using Google Forms, and responses to each question auto-loaded into a spreadsheet for review. Having identified potential participants, I sent the survey via email with an invitation to participate. Data were kept on a password-protected thumbdrive that will be destroyed after five years. No names were shared during the

data-collection process. Participants were also not identified by name. Those who agreed to participate completed an informed consent form before completing the survey (see Appendix A). To protect interview participants' confidentiality, I did not ask names. To increase the study's validity I used member checking with the results of my interviews. Returning the results of each participant's survey improved the credibility of the study and data.

I identified themes through a process of constant comparison and bracketing/coding content for commonality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A constant comparative method is a critical part of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) writing on grounded theory, but earlier work by Glaser (1965) laid the foundation for the use of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed a way to bridge the differences between a basic comprehensive, thematic coding approach, and theory generation with analysis. They suggested a hybrid model where the researcher re-examines all codes each time something is added and identifies commonalities and differences. In this way, theory is constantly being created, or at least refined, systematically (Turner, 2022). It is important to note the human value in inspection and bracketing/coding of material. Citing Glaser, Turner (2022) wrote:

For researchers that apply a very pure grounded theory approach, with no coding, no notes, sometimes not even transcripts, there is a distinct possibility that the hypotheses generated only connects with a very abstracted and un-evenly absorbed reading of the data. Constant comparison encourages the researcher to stay deeply entwined with the data, and the words of the participants, without relying on their own remembered interpretations. (p. 3)

Merriam and Tisdale (2016) added, “The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (p. 227). Meaning was derived through percentages of similar responses, and *Taguette* software was used to determine themes emerging from the codes. I aligned coding themes with survey results and relevant categories I encountered in interviewees’ narrative responses and perspectives.

I had no hypothesis given the nature of phenomenological research. Phenomenological research is done inductively (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis required me to move from raw data to abstract categories and concepts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) considered the absence of a deductive reasoning process led the inductive researcher to be informed by what was inductively learned in the field. I developed findings after the survey data were collected and interviews conducted with selected participants. The narratives shared by participants in these interviews added to the richness of the data available and to the contextual perspective the participants provided.

I used constant comparison to review the results. The four stages of the constant comparative method were utilized. These are comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

I have no direct relationship to the Ukrainian refugee experience; thus, a heuristic approach would not have been helpful. “Heuristic inquiry is even more personalized than phenomenological inquiry in that the researcher includes an analysis of his or her own

experiences as part of the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227). Heuristic phenomenology would be beneficial only if I had a relationship with the Ukrainian refugee experience.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the ongoing conflict, information about Ukraine can often be conflicting. News stories in the popular press provide evolving accounts of the war and its effects on Ukraine and Ukrainians. For example, the number of refugees fleeing Ukraine in response to the immediate conflict vary widely between sources. While much information was shared in the media about the war instigated by Russia in Ukraine, there is a lack of peer-reviewed research specific to the war and the experiences of Ukrainian refugees. I proposed to explore educators’ efforts and strategies to support the education needs of Ukrainian students in American schools and hoped to find an adequate number of studies that highlights existing MLL programs in use with these refugee students. The absence of such research lent urgency to this study.

Another limitation to the study was encountered while reviewing digital models of instruction and mental health services for this student population. I encountered little research in this area and had little information to evaluate concerning programs for Ukrainian refugees. Further, this study did not include culturally relevant pedagogy.

Subject Positioning

I am a 27-year veteran public school administrator and teacher; I oversaw MLL programs in Washington state for 21 years at the middle school and high school levels. I am currently a middle school principal in a district located in suburban/semi-rural area of western Washington. My professional experience includes documented expertise in developing, implementing, and supervising MLL programs for secondary schools. However, I have no direct relationship with

any Ukrainian refugee families or students aside from connections necessary in my role as principal.

As a principal, I have had dozens of students in my school's MLL program, many of whom were Ukrainian refugees. While Ukrainian and other eastern European immigrants have settled in parts of Washington state, including the district where I work, the phenomenon of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine is relatively recent and made collecting data about the population most directly affected by this war (i.e., children and teens) a challenge. However, educators who were familiar with the war's impact on Ukrainian refugees allowed me to understand the phenomenon from an etic perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Summary

This chapter described the phenomenological qualitative approach used. In addition to the survey utilized to develop data to describe Ukrainian students' learning experiences and effective strategies schools implemented to support these students' academic needs, semi-structured interviews with selected participants who were MLL directors and teachers in Washington state were conducted. The setting where I collected data included public schools in the state. The instrumentation used for data collection and analysis, as well as constant-comparative analysis, supported developing categories and themes in the data. Chapter 4 includes findings from the current study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter contains the results of the phenomenological research study conducted to address the following research questions:

1. How has the refugee experience impacted Ukrainian students?
2. What efforts have been made by public schools to address trauma experienced by Ukrainian students?
3. How have schools implemented MLL programs to help Ukrainian youth?
4. To what extent, if at all, are motives propelling Ukrainian refugees to learn English skills different from those of other immigrant students?

This study relied on a phenomenological qualitative design. I sought to explore how the refugee experience has affected Ukrainian students who have relocated to public schools in the Pacific Northwest and the extent to which schools have adapted their MLL programs to fit the educational needs of Ukrainian refugee students. This study focused on providing educators of children who left Ukraine and settled in the United States with a better understanding of the history of warfare, oppression, and trauma that Ukrainians experienced, as well as the needs of Ukrainian refugees who have enrolled in public schools in the United States since early 2022.

In my analysis of the data collected, I applied a constant comparison process and coding to identify themes within the data from interviews and survey responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constant comparison method, “involves comparing one segment of the data with another to determine similarities and differences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.32). The goal of applying constant comparison is to identify categories, or themes, of data to facilitate coding of concepts that emerge from the data. This requires the researcher to begin the process of collecting data

while living in the ambiguity of data. As I collected and categorized the data through Taguette software, I assigned codes in alignment with the research questions I framed at the outset of the study. After each interview and in my examination of 27 surveys returned by respondents, I employed constant comparison to compare the data further, seeking themes from the data.

Merriam and Tisdell state, “The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data.” (p. 32).

I relied on triangulation of the survey data, interviews, and researcher findings to come to conclusions and increase internal validity. Triangulation is used to increase the credibility of findings and to obviate any concern that the findings stem from a single source. Such a single perspective might signal bias in the researcher’s examination and analysis of the data. The use of multiple data points including, in this study, a survey, interviews, and the researcher himself, allows for triangulation that compares and cross-checks data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this chapter I have included the themes that emerged as I coded data from surveys, as well as from interviews I conducted. I have incorporated vignettes from the individual interviews to elucidate themes and the resulting theory.

The purpose of the current study was to identify effective instructional and systematic approaches to support the success of Ukrainian refugees in public schools. Many students who were in various states of social-emotional health had fled their war-ravaged country, in many cases traveling for months before arriving in many parts of the United States, including Washington state, as well as other international destinations. Schools where these refugees enrolled were unprepared for the Ukrainian refugees, who, though having experienced

developmentally and academically appropriate education in their homeland, now presented English-language skills ranging from full fluency to zero English-language awareness. In addition, Ukrainian-born students, unlike generations of immigrants to the U.S. who consciously and willingly embraced their adopted homeland, present various levels of commitment to being in America, as well as evidence of various levels of trauma. Many of these students experienced trauma as a result of their recent experiences antecedent to their arrival in the U.S.; their immediate and long-term success in American schools may rely on educational approaches and practices, especially in an MLL setting, that educators have not heretofore contemplated.

The significance of the study is that educators in the U.S. are unprepared to address the unique needs of the thousands of Ukrainian adolescents entering public schools with various manifestations of emotional and academic need. Many of these refugee students are burdened with the trauma of war and uncertainty about their country and homes in Ukraine, as well as family members who remained in Ukraine as warfare engulfed the country. Many students are coping well and are simply thankful to be safe. Other students experienced terrifying situations including unsafe transportation situations, being taken advantage of financially, unstable housing, and worries about the stability and safety of family and friends who are now scattered around the world or are still in Ukraine in an uncertain situation (Mills, 2022) For teens this situation can be detrimental for their mental health (Mills, 2022).

The aim of the study was to identify effective instructional approaches and systems to support trauma-impacted students and provide educators with pedagogical tools to increase their effectiveness in the classroom with Ukrainian youth. Additionally, the study provides perspective on effective trauma-informed practices and insight into the refugee experience.

Summary of the Findings

I conducted six Zoom interviews for this research. Two of the six participants were directors of MLL programs. Four interviews were with MLL teachers or teachers on special assignment (TOSA). In addition, I collected data from a survey I distributed to 166 MLL educators, including teachers and directors, in Washington state. I received 27 responses. The survey respondents represent school districts in the Puget Sound region of the state. Educators representing nine roles related to MLL instruction responded to the survey, including one each of the following: MLL Facilitator, Instructional Coach/Teacher, ELL Specialist, MLL Russian/Ukrainian Interpreter, District MLL TOSA, and a Superintendent. Four of the respondents were MLL administrators, five were MLL directors, and 11 were MLL teachers (see Appendix B). Using information from the literature review, and data from the survey and interviews, I was able to triangulate the findings as a means of supporting their reliability. The research questions served as anchor points during the analysis.

The Impact of the Refugee Experience

Participants' responses, as collected from the survey data and interviews, suggested that students coming from Ukraine as refugees experienced challenges directly related to their flight from their homeland. Participants used words such as "exhaustion", "emotional trauma", and "anxiety" in their descriptions of how Ukrainian students emotionally present themselves upon being enrolled in an American public school. An MLL teacher said:

The students are mentally and emotionally exhausted from long-term disruption to their sense of safe relationships within community and family. Hyper-anxiety and high sensory

sensitivity to sound and movement make it very difficult for them to focus in large group settings.

Another response from an MLL teacher illustrated this same thought on a school-wide level: “Last year we had a lot of lockdowns which were triggering for our refugee students in ways that other students were not”.

The fragility of those who have been affected by trauma has been documented in existing research. Dr. Smitha Bhandari, as cited by DiLonardo (2021), reviewed triggering behaviors from a medical perspective:

When you have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), your symptoms can come and go. You might feel fine until you hear a car backfire loudly. Suddenly, you become very afraid. Images of your time fighting in a war flood back.

Certain triggers can set off your PTSD. They bring back strong memories. You may feel like you’re living through it all over again. Triggers can include sights, sounds, smells, or thoughts that remind you of the traumatic event in some way. (DiLonardo, 2021)

This is particularly concerning given the fact that responses from 26 of 27 survey respondents said they did not have any method in which to screen the Ukrainian refugees for trauma. Educators are therefore working with students who may or may not need support to identify and address their trauma.

The interviewees also indicated many of the Ukrainian students were impacted by their refugee experiences. One survey respondent stated, “They are scared and unsure of their current circumstances and future.” A district-level MLL TOSA said:

They are more into themselves. They are closed in by their circumstances. They don't want to be here. They want to be home with friends and family. In their minds they are going back to Ukraine. So why should I be doing this?

This was corroborated by research that states that refugees may experience high levels of psychological distress and have high rates of mental health challenges (Turrini, 2019).

Compounding the struggles refugee students may face are the cultural resistance and systematic lack of mental health services in Ukraine where those who seek help may experience stigma, high costs, and poor quality of care (Burlaka, et. al., 2014). Burlaka continues, "Ukraine is a post-communist country in which individual child mental health problems have often been forsaken in favor of collective well-being (Burlaka, et. al., 2014)

While traumatizing experiences are not uncommon among Ukrainian refugees who now live in the United States, not all students were exposed to traumatic situations or experiences that impact their mental or physical well-being. The survey and interviews indicated some of the students were well-adjusted and thriving. One of those who responded to the survey said:

Their basic needs are being met. We don't see any negative behaviors or other outward signs of trauma at school. The kids do not talk about what is happening in the Ukraine presently but will share stories about their life back home without any sign of distress. Another respondent stated, "They are proud of being Ukrainian and quick to acclimate to the routine of school and make friends easily in my MLL class." An interviewee noted that once a Ukrainian boy established a strong and trusting relationship with his teachers, he "needed the opportunity to have someone else listen to him and share—to let it all out!"

One impact noted by both the survey respondents and interviewees is the academic orientation of Ukrainian refugees. Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the winter of 2022, Ukrainian students, like their counterparts in other parts of Europe as well other Western countries, enjoyed routines of learning and school attendance. The war with Russia upended that sense of normality. One whom I interviewed stated, “Despite the students having experienced strong educational programs in their homeland, teachers systematically tend to coddle them with low expectations.” Another interviewee, noting the risks inherent in treating refugees as though they are different from their peers, averred, “Pulling them out of regular classrooms can be traumatic for kids. If they are highly cognitive students being separated from their peers, we better have really good reasons for doing this.”

The sense of wanting to learn more about how to serve Ukrainian students in the classroom surfaced in the survey when several survey respondents noted they wished to receive culturally-specific professional development relating to Ukrainian students (Appendix C). When answering a question about misconceptions regarding MLL instruction one respondent, an MLL teacher stated, “Many teachers will just let them sit in class. It is simply not true that you have to pull them out of class because they don’t know the language. They are really bright, but they just don’t have the language, yet.”

Addressing Learning Challenges Rooted in Trauma

A primary theme expressed in the surveys and the interviews with MLL educators is the lack of trauma screening, training, and implementation of trauma-informed practices in American classrooms and schools. Of those who responded to the survey and participated in interviews, only two (7.4%) had received professional development (PD) for supporting trauma

in Ukrainian refugees (Appendix D). Most survey respondents wanted to receive PD on educating Ukrainian refugees while 25 of the 27 of the survey respondents (92%), had not been given PD on Ukrainian students' needs, including their potential trauma. Only one respondent replied that their school had a strategy, in this case including counselors, mental health therapists, interpreters, and twice-monthly support meetings for families and students. Another said they had outside relationships, including partnerships with resettlement agencies, community-based organizations, and family liaisons. Of those interviewed, none indicated that their schools provided incoming refugee students with screening to detect the extent to which they were impacted by trauma. One interviewee stated, "We should have (trauma) training since we are getting more Ukrainian students. They are coming from a place we can't even imagine."

Thomas (2019) suggested that further exploration of the services available to refugee students is needed. The data in the current study are inconclusive as to whether schools should adopt a trauma-informed model for supporting the learning and emotional needs unique to Ukrainian refugee students. Interviews I conducted, together with the review of literature that accompanies this study, showed a need for trauma-informed practices. Research indicated training on the mental models, defined as beliefs and values, of educators, was one approach suggested by the literature review. However, transitioning to a trauma-informed mental model that recommends schools not view these students from a deficit model and instead view students as having been affected in some way by their experiences is another path (Thomas, 2019). Thomas goes on to state how one effective model, developed by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Western Washington University's Ray-Simmer Wolpow, "Provides six principles for compassionate instruction and discipline in the classroom: (a) always empower,

never disempower; (b) provide unconditional positive regard; (c) maintain high expectations; (d) check assumptions, observe, and question; (e) be a relationship coach; (f) provide guided opportunities for helpful participation (Thomas, 2019)

All interview participants indicated that the process of getting trauma support for their Ukrainian students was through the MLL teacher. A response from an interviewee summed up the professional development training they had received. They stated they had been a part of some small trainings on trauma-informed instruction here and there, but they were mainly self-trained. Another respondent told a story of how unprepared she was to support her students when they became terrified during a winter storm that had thunder and lightning. Her students equated the weather event to bombings they had witnessed in the Ukraine. None of the interviewees indicated any form of screening intake for trauma for Ukrainian students. Three of the interviewees, one MLL director and two MLL teachers, in separate conversations about social emotional screeners that might be adopted to support these students offered bluntly, “We should.”

All the interview participants indicated that a key to supporting their students in the classroom was relationships. Thomas (2019) echoed this perspective, identifying the foundation to developing a trauma-informed culture is based on intentionally building and sustaining meaningful relationships with and between all school community members, including staff, administrators, and the students. Thomas added, “Resource literature places a strong emphasis on using new knowledge to employ empathetic responses to students who are trauma-exposed and avoiding approaching students from a deficit perspective when they exhibit behavior that is considered problematic or disruptive” (p. 426).

Empathetic listening may be beneficial in developing trusting relationships. A participant I interviewed indicated that a key to getting to the stories from the students was through relationships and listening to them. They added the only way to make a difference with her students was to get to know them and their families on a personal level. “I would have done things differently with my Ukrainian students. I would have sat down with them and their families to understand their situations better. This would allow me to get to know how their time in school was previously.”

Two other interviewees said when a personal connection was made, they felt the trust between the educators and the students grew and led to increased learning. One interviewee identified one-on-one conversations as helping to develop a trusting relationship by which to support teens through not only trauma, but also in just being a teen student. One veteran MLL teacher indicated that they steadily teach the kids lessons day-in and day-out but empathizing with them at the same time. This, he added, “leads to trust over time.”

Survey responses related to professional development indicated very little interest in trauma-informed instruction. Only three responses in the survey indicated interest in more training in this area. Of the 27 who responded to the survey, only two indicated they received training to screen Ukrainian refugees for trauma. Also, it is of note that only one survey respondent indicated that, as an MLL educator, they would like to receive PD specific to trauma-informed instructional training (Appendix E). On one hand, educators indicate they need more training to understand students’ needs; yet the data I collected suggest that those educators closest to MLL learners do not prioritize the training that might provide guidance as to best

practices, despite broad acknowledgment among respondents that they lack knowledge of how to support MLL students, particularly Ukrainian refugees.

Programs to Support Ukrainian Students

As reflected in survey responses and interviews, districts have employed several approaches to support MLL youth in MLL classrooms. Six MLL instructional models were mentioned as predominant by those who implement these approaches in their schools (see Appendix F):

- Support Mainstream (65.4%)
- Sheltered Instruction (46.2%)
- Collaborative ESL and General Education (34.6%)
- English as a Second Language (ESL) (27.9%)
- Newcomer Programs (23.1%)
- Co-teaching (19.2%)

Interview responses paralleled those from the survey, with ESL, guided language acquisition design, sheltered instruction observation protocol, and universal design for learning being the primary programs and approaches cited by interviewees as being used in schools and classrooms. Those I interviewed were divided as to their support for PD to use these models in classrooms. For example, one interviewee stated that a common MLL instructional misconception was that there is something happening in the MLL classroom that is not connected to general education and does not support student learning. This MLL director stated, “Learning how to embed scaffolded approaches in general education classrooms to support general education teachers is an effective strategy for linking MLL teachers and general

education teachers.” She went on to say the onus for professional development is the current gap in supporting both MLL and general education teachers.

Another teacher interviewee they addressed this issue by carefully identifying students who are motivated to learn and eager for a challenge. He continued by saying, “I place them in general education classes and check in on the students regularly to gauge their comfort level and ensure the material is compatible with their ability level with English.” He stated programs such as *Quill* and *Achieve 3000* that assist teachers with identifying materials at the correct levels of reading for the students are essential to show students’ growth and to keep them motivated. This approach lets the students gain access to general education classes, teachers, and materials by having programs that allow students to access appropriate materials that fit their skills.

A common theme identified in the research, as well as by those I interviewed and surveyed, is the importance of good basic instruction. Among survey takers, this was defined as co-teaching and collaborative ESL/general education approaches. Those I interviewed described a collaboration between MLL and general education teachers. One example that highlighted this perspective was how an MLL teacher could work with an English/language arts teacher to modify content to support language acquisition. An MLL teacher added, “My job is to show general education teachers some of the strategies, like modeling or pictures, or letting the kids lead the learning when they know the objective, which just speeds up the learning loop.” Research from Marsh (2018) corroborated this view, stating the most effective approach to supporting MLL students in the academic core was good basic instruction. Marsh added that cultural disposition and culturally relevant pedagogy are central for teachers to provide sound MLL instruction. This agrees with responses from survey respondents, who overwhelmingly

(96%) indicated an interest in having more culturally responsive instructional training. An MLL director illustrated this point with an anecdote about teachers using culturally irrelevant materials and how the kids did not connect with or understand the work. “They didn’t understand the nuances of politics, and the article just bored them to tears. It is important to provide culturally relevant materials.”

In addition, the majority of survey respondents (72%) indicated an interest in more family and community inclusion approaches and training. These responses are a clear sign MLL educators need and want more culturally responsive instruction training and support. This theme continued among interviewees (See Appendix G). One interviewee stated the way their program was set up when they arrived was that students just came to class. Teachers did not know the students or their families. This teacher reported that they wished they could have gotten to know the students and their families before the start of school to build relationships. In contrast, an MLL teacher described her personal approach to getting to know a family of a student: “I spent the day with the family on a school field trip. They had been impacted in Ukraine and didn’t know the culture of American schools. I learned how I could support them and their student on the field-trip.”

Three interviewees stated the Ukrainian students are very capable academically, but when they come into class they are reserved. There are oftentimes assumptions that they misbehave because they are not capable, but, one interviewee stated, it really is just a language barrier. Another MLL teacher, who, as a young English-speaking American child, moved to Korea. He shared that his silence and loneliness was a part of his experience because he did not know the language or culture and that is what his current students are experiencing. Another MLL

educator described a lesson about World War II and vocabulary. The recent war in Ukraine precipitated the exodus of families, including school-age children, from that country. The students requested that they skip the lesson due to being tired of hearing about the war and the difficult nature of the content. An MLL director concluded, “Cultural relevance needs to be a value to all of the teachers for all of our students to learn.” Nevertheless, none of the six interviewees was able to identify a clear approach for culturally responsive training or support.

Distinctions Between Ukrainian Refugee Students and Other Immigrants

The review of literature, surveys, and interviews all point to a complicated scenario for MLL educators and students who are Ukrainian war refugees. Magos and Margaroni (2022) stated, “Trauma and stress can come from the refugee experience itself, what caused it, and the painful process of acculturation” (2022, p.3). Similarly, interviewees and respondents said that Ukrainian students, fleeing the war in their homeland, have a perspective on their situation in this country that distinguishes them from other immigrant students. Several responses from the interviews indicated students do not want to be here, do not want to learn English, and appear to have a difficult time finding connections within schools. One MLL teacher stated, “They just want to be kids.” Comments from survey respondents included social struggles for students who have experienced the trauma of war, concerns these students have about family and friends in Ukraine, and hyper-anxiety and sensitivity to sounds and movement as barriers to focusing in large-group settings in school. Several added that, for these students, uncertainties from not knowing whether the move to the United States was permanent or temporary make it difficult for them to be motivated to do schoolwork. In addition, they simply want to fit in, understand, and interact with other students. Interviewees stated the same concerns and added the students are

hesitant to put more effort into learning when they believe they are going home any time. An MLL teacher stated the kids attitude is best summarized in this manner, “I am here temporarily so why try? I am going back home-why should I put effort into my learning when everything will be fine?” A high school MLL teacher described a situation in which a Ukrainian student was motivated and tried hard to be successful at school. However, the whole situation was overwhelming to her and at times she would just sit in class and cry. An MLL teacher added, “School is a place where all of the talk of war is not the center of everything. They get to focus on curriculum.” A frustrated MLL teacher added, “The first thing I am going to do is teach them how to school, Schooling 101.” Participants suggested that immigrant students may feel isolated. Two of the interviewees stated a lack of peer connections led them to structure class activities where the kids had to partner with another student. “They don’t have anyone to talk to and are missing friends and family.” stated one of the teachers.

Previous literature, combined with the interviews, and the survey results all note similar concerns as to whether students may be placed in the appropriate academic classes despite their language abilities. Cummins (2005) identified five principles for language acquisition. The first principle posits that students’ proficiency in their original language is positively associated with academic achievement. Many of those who responded to the survey said their Ukrainian students were very bright and academically strong due to a rigorous education system in the Ukraine. It follows, then, that it is important that students be placed in appropriate academic programs. One interviewee said that inaccurate assumptions are made about Ukrainian students’ academics, and they are “bored to tears.” This was echoed in a survey respondent’s comments that their students

are very strong academically but can struggle socially or with teachers they deem unkind. Magos and Margaroni (2018) state the case directly:

In many cases, the presence of refugees initially creates panic in the classroom and school, educational organizations make efforts in a variety of ways to overcome language and cultural barriers. However, as Bunar (2015) says, they seem to do little to change their internal social and pedagogical practices sufficiently. They usually project external barriers, such as the large number of refugees, poor coordination and inadequate communication with educational counselors and supervisors, lack of appropriate resources and training. Also, they quite often isolate refugee students in separate schools or classes, use inadequate teaching methods or materials for this group, ignore their cultural references, and the conditions of life and education in their countries of origin. (2018, p.2)

This focus on the importance of appropriate academic placement aligns with comments from survey respondents that the students just want to fit in with their English-speaking peers. One of those interviewed commented educators need to “deeply know their needs.” This interviewee also said that Ukrainian students will feel safer if we were to create classrooms where they feel they belong. This participant noted that one of the primary approaches to teaching MLL students is by placing them into a MLL class; however, this model is isolating for students. They added that if educators “pull cognitively strong students, no matter their background or language, from their peers and general education classrooms, we could be creating more trauma for them.” They continued, “If our goal is to make them feel normal, then the teaching needs to happen in the general population with well-trained teachers.” Another

interviewee stated, “I begin by working with the in-class model and close their learning gaps. I can’t immediately push them out to general education classrooms.” They went on to say that, by monitoring academic screening tools and student motivation, they can assess whether they are prepared to go out into push-in classes.

Challenges to supporting Ukrainian MLL students were presented by survey respondents who identified a number of concerns with educating MLL students. Among barriers to MLL students’ success are mislabeling MLL students as learning disabled; lack of support in terms of time, money, PD, lack of collaboration, or understanding from colleagues; and administrators interjecting practices into work that were not in line with program goals. An MLL director stated in her interview that an instructional design model was the goal stated as an expectation for the MLL teachers. However, “a lot of work is needed for our teachers to approach planning from the standards backwards to what kids need versus what activities to do in class.” They also expressed that this work “is hard,” but continued that if we truly want to help students in MLL classes feel normal, we need to know them and not make assumptions about their abilities. She continued that if we want Ukrainian kids, who come from strong educational backgrounds, to feel supported, we need to provide them with high expectations in classes with their peers. An interviewee stated this can help them

. . . feel safe if we create structures in the general education classrooms, whether they know English or not, to help them to feel normal. Over time they can feel unworthy if they are misplaced in classes. They can feel good knowing they are getting good instruction.

Another theme I noted during interviews is a disparity as to who owns the responsibility for creating the environment in which Ukrainian students may develop success. The director feels the responsibility to have their teachers improve their abilities to help more MLL students. The MLL teachers stated a lack of PD, a cohesive curriculum, and inadequate preparation were the main barriers to supporting MLL students. Comments from MLL directors pointed toward teachers, e.g., “Good teachers need to approach their students from a backwards design perspective.” This MLL director continued, “If we are content-driven and not about scaffolding for learning and what students’ need, we are missing the mark.” Another comment from a director was that there is a misconception that there is a lack of training for MLL teachers. She went on to say that the curriculum is not going to be a fix. She summarized their thinking by stating that mindset was the greatest tool, including implementing a design for units that keep all kids in mind. Furthermore, she added, there does not even have to be a curriculum at all. She continued, “It is hard for teachers, but it is inside them. If they use a Universal Design for Instruction approach with a mental model that they can do it, they can.”

In contrast to the perspective offered by MLL directors, MLL teachers commented that they had little to no training in a coherent curricular approach. One interviewee stated they had been a part of several MLL strategies, but in a different district years before her current role. Another stated without offering specifics that they had some self-training, but not in a particular curriculum. One stated they had not had the training and does not think about trauma-informed practices with the students. They added their classroom approach was entirely up to them to create and design. “I work with classroom teachers to plan instruction and make sure we are not creating an educational gap between the content areas and the MLL classrooms.” an MLL

teacher stated. One area where both the directors and teachers agreed was that MLL educators need more targeted PD on instructional strategies for multi-language learners (See Appendix H).

Summary

This chapter begins with a description of the approach taken with this research. It describes the phenomenological approach which includes a constant comparison method and triangulation of the data. This chapter also describes the interviews and the survey instrument I used to collect data. The purpose of this study was to identify effective instructional and systematic approaches to help support the success of Ukrainian refugees in public schools. This study is significant due to U.S. educators being unprepared to address the unique needs of Ukrainian adolescents who are entering public schools with various manifestations of emotional and academic needs. This chapter addressed the impact of the refugee experience Ukrainian students emigrating to the U.S. and also discussed how to address the learning challenges rooted in trauma. The chapter summarized the programs to support Ukrainian MLL students and the distinction between Ukrainian refugee students and other immigrants. Chapter 5 will articulate my conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study used four research questions regarding the education of Ukrainian war refugees in MLL classrooms:

1. How has the refugee experience impacted Ukrainian students?
2. What efforts have been made by public schools to address trauma experienced by Ukrainian students?
3. How have schools implemented MLL programs to help Ukrainian youth?
4. To what extent, if at all, are motives propelling Ukrainian refugees to learn English skills different from those of other immigrant students?

I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to address these questions. The purpose of the study was to examine the phenomena that have accompanied Ukrainians of school age, including a consideration of whether these students have been impacted by their experiences surrounding their flight from their homeland; to explore whether and to what extent schools have implemented MLL programs, including but not limited to professional development for MLL staff, specific to Ukrainian youth; and to identify effective instructional and systematic approaches to help support the success of Ukrainian refugees in public schools.

This study focused on providing educators of children who left Ukraine and settled in the United States with a better understanding of the history of warfare in the Ukraine, oppression, and trauma that Ukrainians experienced, as well as the needs of Ukrainian refugees who enrolled in public schools in the United States since Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings in the context of extant research as well as based on the surveys and interviews that formed the substance of my study. In addition, I offer

recommendations that MLL programs, school sites, and districts offering MLL programs for students might adopt. Lastly, I provide suggestions for further research.

As reflected in current practice, MLL teachers are expected to screen students, determine their social-emotional needs, determine an effective program approach, implement programming and curriculum, support students' learning in multiple classrooms, and modify curriculum for general education teachers. These expectations lead to problems that this research sought to address.

The aim of the study was to identify and describe effective instructional approaches to support trauma-impacted students and to provide educators with pedagogical tools to increase their effectiveness in teaching Ukrainian youth. I have relied on a phenomenological design for identifying participants and for collection of data and subsequent analysis of those data. Furthermore, I employed constant comparison and triangulation to identify themes within the research.

As reflected in the data I collected, trauma screening and trauma-informed practices were areas that surfaced as dominant themes related to perceived best practice with MLL educators. Instruction in these areas during targeted professional development would allow teachers to empathize more completely with their students' emotional state which in turn could encourage trust and ultimately engagement. Without trauma screeners, MLL educators are essentially guessing at what is going on with their students and their social-emotional needs. Because many Ukrainian students, like other immigrant students, arrive in American schools having little more than rudimentary English language fluency, screeners would need to be provided in the home

language, or with a translator accompanying the person screening. Some of those I interviewed said, unequivocally, development and implementation of trauma screening “should be done.”

At the beginning of each school year, and when a newcomer arrives in class, a translated version of an ACEs screener could be provided to each student to identify what their experiences have been in their home country and throughout their travels. This could be done in a small or large group setting with a school counselor or psychologist providing the assessment. This tool could support the next steps in addressing the social/emotional needs of our MLL students.

This is reinforced by studies showing more than 30% of Ukrainian war refugees adolescents are impacted by PTSD or had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Burlaka, 2016) It is important to note that students who are from the active war region in Ukraine and fled that region as Russian forces invaded had friends or family injured or killed in war, or experienced trauma prior to arriving in their new country as refugees. These students are more susceptible to having PTSD symptoms (Ben-Ezra, 2022).

Gaining access to the mental models addressed in the research is the first step in implementing trauma-informed practice. Sweetman (2022) reminds educators,

Refugees frequently struggle with concentration and may also have relational and behavioral difficulties. Logistical difficulties around attendance, resources, and PTSD-type symptoms add to their burden and lead to dropping out or gaining a reputation as a troublemaker or incapable student. The foundation of the “trauma-informed classroom” is an understanding by teachers of the daily circumstances of their pupils’ lives, and awareness of what trauma-based reactions and behaviors look like. (p.1)

Shifting perspectives and building emotionally healthy school cultures is about not becoming “stuck” on students’ trauma-triggered behaviors but viewing each one as having been affected in some way by their experiences (Thomas, 2019). This gap was recognized by interviewees and survey participants as they shared that cultural competency training for teachers of Ukrainian students was absent; similarly, data I collected from surveys and from interviews suggest that culturally focused professional development for MLL educators has been limited, if available at all. School districts that serve trauma-affected immigrant students have an opportunity, if not an obligation, to address this deficit with classroom teachers who form the first line in creating learning opportunities for Ukrainian students to help them develop an empathetic understanding for and patience with these children who may simply need time to develop trust with new adult educators and establish relationships with both the peers and teachers around them. As overwhelmingly attested by participants in this study, the essential component in understanding how the refugee experience has impacted Ukrainian students is developing strong relationships.

Washington public school MLL educators reported attempting to address the trauma experienced by Ukrainian refugees. One survey respondent stated that their school did have a uniform manner to partner with local refugee agencies and families to support Ukrainian war refugees. Unfortunately, such efforts are scarce and/or inconsistent, as reported by both survey respondents and interviewees as manifestations of local educator efforts, not a practice found universally in school districts that serve MLL populations, much less communities that have welcomed Ukrainian families.

It is clear that professional development for MLL educators should be offered to provide needed tools to support the complex social-emotional and academic needs of Ukrainian war refugees. Trauma-informed instructional professional development should be considered by school districts to close the learning gap among MLL teachers. Also, this same trauma-informed training should be implemented for all staff to enhance cultural competency of staff. The fundamental question facing many educators, according to the comments made by one MLL director, is whether all students, no matter their language or background, deserve a rigorous and challenging general education. This sentiment was echoed by other MLL teacher interviewees. An MLL teacher reflecting on student placement said, “Don’t wait to get them (Ukrainian MLL students) up to grade level—just look for their ability to adapt and improvise.”

It became clear through my research of literature and in the survey data and interviews that relationships are the key component to showing Ukrainian refugees they are supported and surrounded by trusting adults. The statement by one interviewee that “simply getting to know her students as individuals allowed them to open up and be heard” gives insight into the value of relationships. Another MLL teacher stated this is how he learned about his students and their stories. He then open up to him about his learning.

Three themes emerged concerning the question of how schools are implementing Ukrainian youth education. The first is that there are methods intentionally being used in MLL classrooms. While they are not specifically designed for Ukrainian youth, the consensus by respondents and interviewees supports the implementation of a push-in model in which MLL students are placed in general education classes and supported by both the content-area teacher

and the MLL teacher or the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). Interviewees and respondents indicated they were trained in both models.

Good basic instruction, emphasized by one MLL director, was also a research theme to address the question about what effective practices accompany MLL programs to help Ukrainian refugees. Interviewees stated Ukrainian students are used to rigorous educational programs. Their school experiences antecedent to their arrival in the United States included effective teaching and high expectations for learning. They expect high rigor and engagement. As an MLL director observed, “We better have really good reasons for separating cognitively strong Ukrainian kids from their peers.” This observation offers a compelling argument against instructional models that separate Ukrainian MLL students unnecessarily from grade-alike peers. The data I collected leads me to recommend schools focus on implementing high quality instructional models and follow that with PD in all classrooms for MLL teachers and others who teach refugee students to ensure a strong basic education.

When I asked if Ukrainian refugee students’ motivations for learning English are different from other immigrants, several themes emerged. Not surprisingly, a common thread from the research, interviewees, and survey respondents is that most Ukrainian youth are impacted by their refugee experience. Some of the interviewees said their students were well-adjusted and doing fine, but many stated Ukrainian students have exhibited behaviors consistent with PTSD. Interviewees said students seemed lonely, tired of hearing about the war, worried about friends and family in the Ukraine, and closed in. The theme emerged of Ukrainian war refugee students being angry about having to be in the United States and resistant to learning English as a personal protest and way to control their surroundings.

Even as the Ukrainian students' academic strengths were recognized by the interviewees, another theme surfaced: readiness to learn. One teacher said that after they got to know students and could diagnose their level of engagement and work ethic, they would place them in general education classes and support them in a push-in model. However, students who did not want to engage in academics would remain in a pull-out MLL class.

While the goal is to teach students English to help them socially and academically, the route that surfaced in this area was through relationships. One MLL teacher explained through a story that one of her students, when she first enrolled in that school, was angry, scared, and unwilling to do the work. After getting to know the MLL teacher, the student's emotional walls came down and she told the teacher all her concerns and stories and, furthermore, began to show her academic strengths. Another told the story of a brother and sister who mastered conversational English in about a year. The teacher's only role with them after this was to support them with academic vocabulary specific to content-area classes. Positive relationships with caring adults were the vehicle to get Ukrainian war refugees focused on learning.

Recommendations

There are a several areas where schools can improve or refine their MLL services for these students. Some of these changes are fast, inexpensive, and easily implemented. Others are systematic, will take time, and will require an investment in training and resources. The first area is a focus and commitment to ongoing professional development for MLL and general education teachers.

The primary mission of MLL teachers is to take students when they arrive and improve both their social language abilities and academic language abilities in English. This is a difficult

task. The task becomes more difficult when there is minimal administrator leadership. MLL teachers need a clear vision to know exactly what it is they are supposed to do for their students, what barriers may exist that would impede the desired learning, and how to provide the most effective support for their students' acculturation and learning. This begins with the district sharing a clear vision with principals, TOSAs, general education teachers, counselors, and even students' families. The intent in doing so is that everyone involved in the complex activity of educating MLL students has the same vision, knows their role, and can apply themselves to helping MLL students learn. This vision should include listening to the students and families, as well as the general education teachers, MLL teachers, and administration to learn and understand what gaps or deficiencies exist in the system. Without leadership or accountability, the system is likely to be ineffective or erratic in accomplishing the mission.

To access students academically, it is important for teachers to know their students and see them as people. MLL and general education teachers must have training in cultural competency to know their students better. Not taking the time to learn about each student's cultural experience can be perceived by the students as uncaring. This creates a wedge between the teachers and their MLL students at a point in their relationship when building trust is critical. Stories by MLL educators illustrate this truth with personal anecdotes of moments that allow trauma-impacted students to transcend their situation and begin to build trusting relationships.

Providing educators with tools to identify and address the trauma students have experienced is also an area that needs to be understood and addressed to support the teaching and learning of Ukrainian youth. Developing trauma screening administered by trained counselors or psychologists would give educators a starting point with MLL students, particularly those with

traumatic experiences in their background and possibly PTSD. Early identification could be the start of providing comprehensive wrap-around services including working with all general education teachers and parents, as well as refugee services groups, churches, medical providers, or other agencies willing to partner with schools.

Implementing a trauma screener to identify students' likelihood of having PTSD means educators may need to be trained in trauma-informed practices for in-depth interpretation and analysis of the survey results. As was noted in the previous chapter, the value of trauma-informed practices begins with the mental model that is fundamental for all educators: MLL students are students like any other and are worthy of having appropriate modifications and accommodations made to curricula and materials. In addition, this creates a collaborative ownership and relationship between staff and creates a focus on the kids who need help to develop English language proficiency. This feeling of support to the students carries over to the classroom, where a sense of being supported may be accompanied by more commitment by students to the academic outcomes their teachers seek. This is a mutually beneficial scenario for the students and teachers.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study was, from the outset, limited in its scope. I have addressed these limitations in Chapter 1. Considering how this study might lead to additional research focused on English-language learners in general or on Ukrainian refugee students in particular, other studies might include the voices of the students themselves. Students who navigated the MLL programs deserve to be heard concerning what was effective and what more they needed to gain access to

their education. I have not focused on the voices of students in this research, but I recommend future research explore this area of MLL education.

In addition to the students, MLL educators in the classroom might be surveyed to determine which parts of their programs are effective and which components need to be modified or eliminated. These educators work with their staff, students, families, and administrators to implement the programs and know what components of their programs need more support, including their own professional development and that of their general education colleagues, as well as curricular approaches that are effective or ineffective. Focusing research on MLL educators and their needs would also improve the teaching and learning of MLL students.

Despite legal mandates to ensure that education is a birthright of every American student, without exception, that birthright remains elusive. As a practicing educator, closing the achievement gap for all students has been a guiding principle for my beliefs and values every day of my career. Knowing my students and knowing my teachers' needs is the cornerstone of my leadership and a source of pride for me as an educator. The experience I shared at the beginning of this research where I met with and did not know my student was humbling. The experience of attempting to be relational and realizing I was, in fact, ignorant of my own students led me to this work. I came to the realization I was inadequately prepared for my students' needs. It was eye opening to me to realize that many of our educators, including MLL educators, do not have the tools to support their Ukrainian war refugee students adequately. The purpose of this research is to assist educators in closing that gap for a particular group of our students who need our social-emotional and academic help: our Ukrainian war refugees.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent for Survey Instrument

We are asking you to be in a research study. Participation is voluntary. The purpose of this form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about anything that is not clear. When we have answered all of your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.”

Study Title

Educating Adolescent Ukrainian War Refugees

Study Purpose and Rationale

As a participant, you will be asked to complete an online survey entitled Survey for Multi-Language Learner Directors and Teachers. This survey focuses on effective instructional practices for supporting Washington students who are Ukrainian refugees. The purpose of this research project is to study effective instructional decisions in classrooms and school-wide systems to support Ukrainian refugees. Due to the sudden influx of Ukrainian refugees due to the war in their home-country a high volume of Ukrainian students and their families have arrived in Washington state and are attending Washington state public schools. Many of these students are arriving with little to no English language knowledge and are new to an American culture. The purpose of this research project is to support these students with effective methods so they are supported and can find success educationally and social-emotionally.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be eligible to participate in this study, the participant must be above the age of 18 and a Director of Multi-Language Learner (MLL) program or a MLL teacher.

Participation Procedures and Duration

For this project, the participant will be asked to complete a questionnaire about effective Instruction and support systems for Ukrainian immigrants and the survey should take no more than 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

All responses will be anonymous meaning that no identifying data will be collected in the survey. I know that I may refuse to answer any question asked and that I may discontinue participation at any time.

Storage of Data

All anonymous responses and data will be either stored on a secure server or transferred to an external hard drive and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Your data will not be used or distributed for future research. Only the research team will have access to the data.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no anticipated or perceived risks in participating in the questionnaire. Participation may be discontinued at any time without penalty.

Benefits

There are no benefits for individuals participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission by stopping the survey at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the researcher before submitting this form and at any time during the study

Researcher Contact Information

Principal Investigator:

Eric Cahan, Doctoral Student
Western Washington University
Woodring College of Education
(206) 965-0915

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Don Larsen
Western Washington University
Woodring College of Education
Educational Leadership & Inclusive Teaching
(360) 650-3000 x3090

For questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Western Washington University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) at compliance@wwu.edu or (360) 650-2146.

Consent

By clicking the link below, you are agreeing that you have read the description of this project, are at least 18 years of age, and give consent to be a participant. You further understand that a copy or download of this informed consent may be kept by you for future reference.

Please access survey through this link. (Press Control and then click the hyperlink):

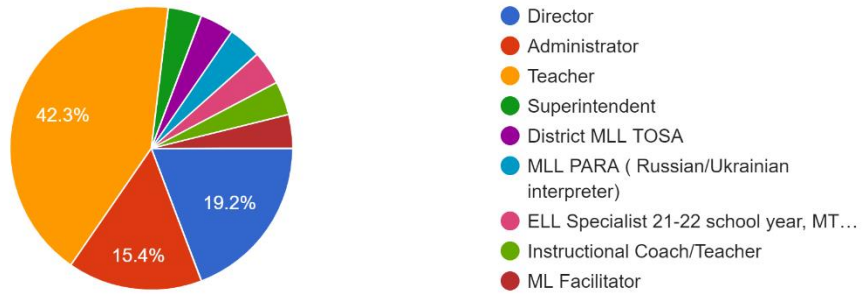
[Educating Adolescent Ukrainian War Refugees](#)

Appendix B

Role Related to MLL Programs

What role do you play at your school/district in regard to MLL programming?

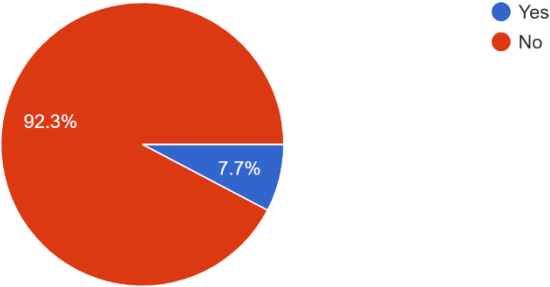
26 responses



Appendix C

PD Related to Ukrainian Refugee Students

Have you received professional development that is specific to the education of Ukrainian refugees?
26 responses

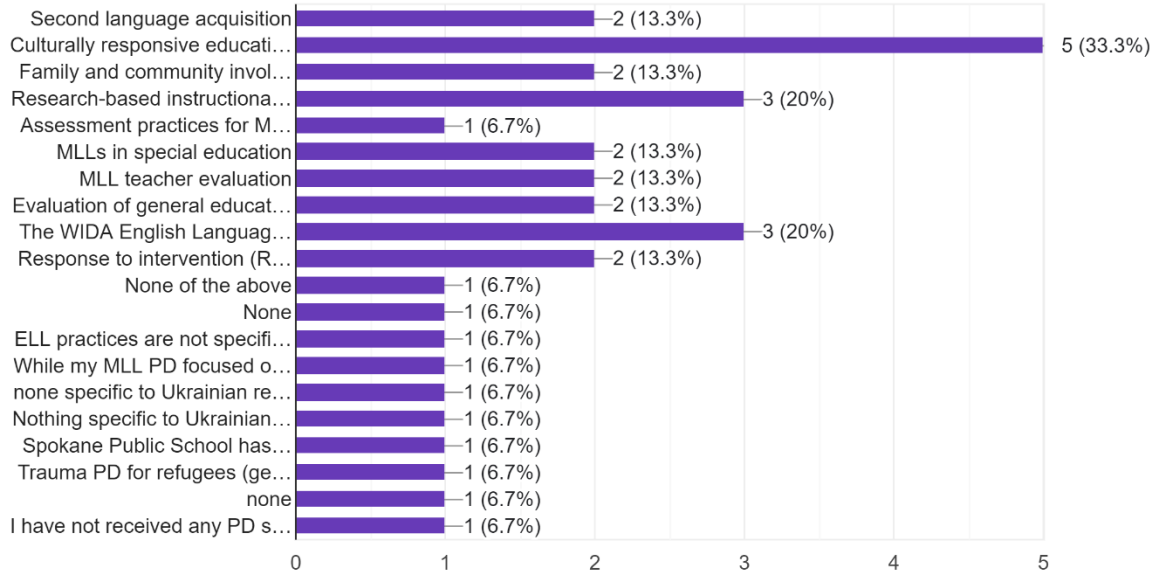


Appendix D

PD Specific to Ukrainian Refugees

Which of the following areas have you received professional development that is specific to the education of Ukrainian refugees? (Check all that apply)

15 responses

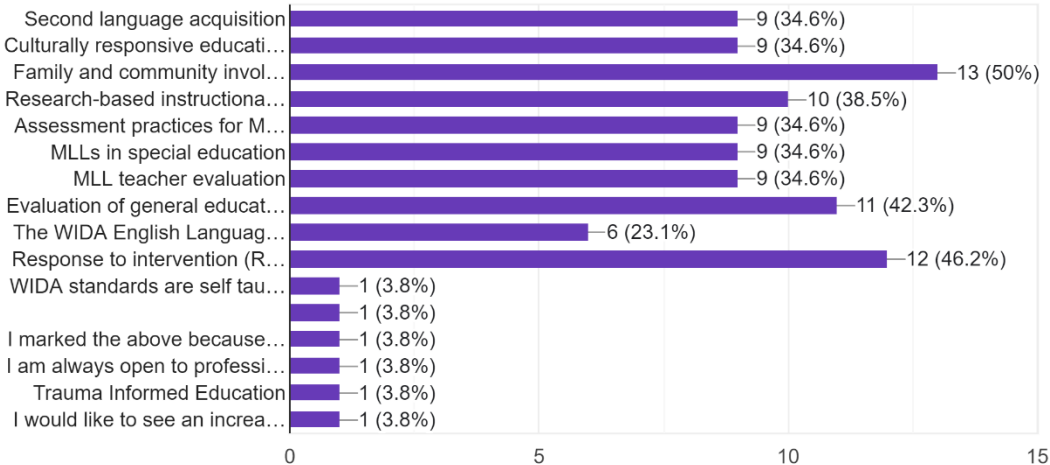


Appendix E

Areas of PD Educators Would Like to Receive

Which of the following areas would you like to receive professional development that is specific to the education of MLLs? (Check all that apply)

26 responses

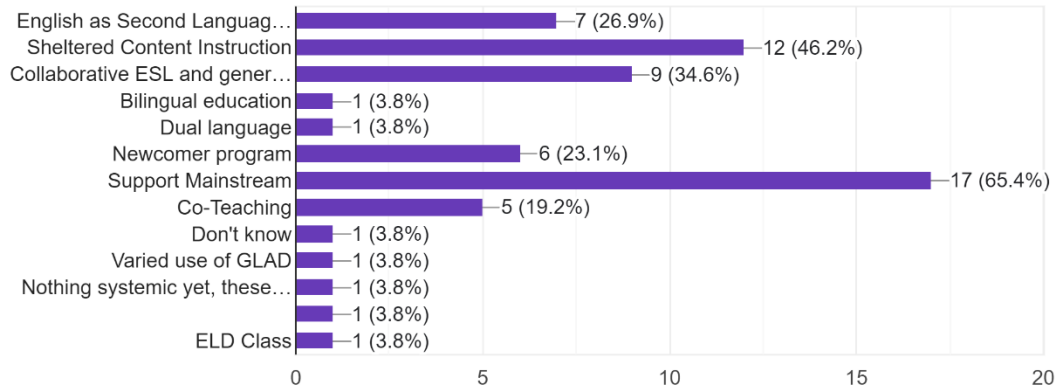


Appendix F

MLL Instructional Models

In your school, which MLL instructional models are currently used? (Check all that apply)

26 responses

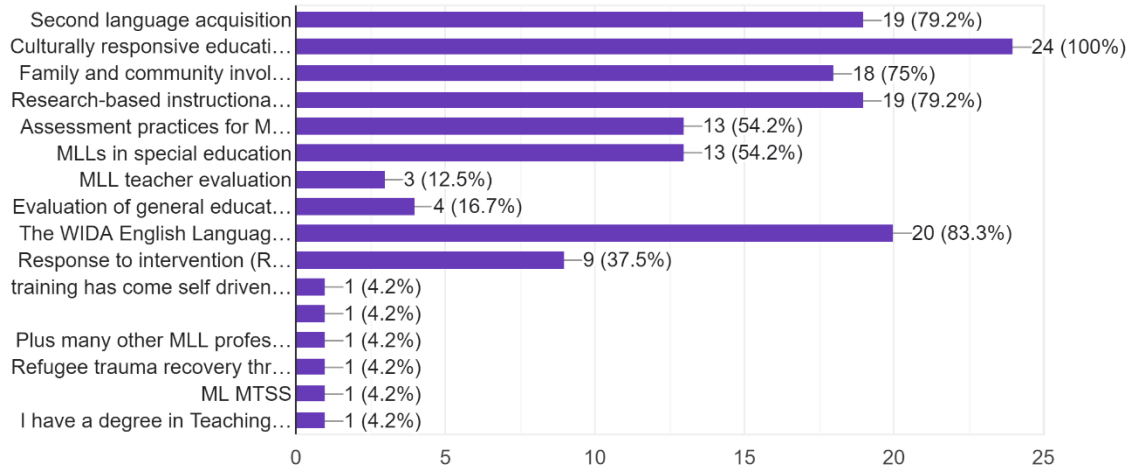


Appendix G

PD Areas Related to the Education of MLLs

Which of the following areas have you received professional development that is specific to the education of MLLs? (Check all that apply)

24 responses



Appendix H

PD Related to MLL Education

Have you received professional development that is specific to the education of MLLs
26 responses

