# Military Experience and School Leadership Development in North Carolina

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores six principals' and assistant principals' military experience and leadership development. The participants were purposefully selected based on being a principal or assistant principal and having a minimum of 4 years of military service as a Non-Commissioned Officer or Officer in any United States military branch. The participants, from two counties in North Carolina, were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. The resulting themes were (a) accountability to family, superiors, subordinates; (b) the need for special programs aiding with transitions; and (c) Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) versus Military Training. The findings revealed that specific MOS did not influence the participants' leadership development. However, military training influenced the leadership development from their military career to education leadership. This research extends previous investigations about military experience and principalship in the United States and Israel. The results are discussed, and recommendations for superintendents and local educational agencies are provided.

Sergiovani (1995) endorsed recruiting principals from beyond the teaching ranks who have developed the necessary skills from other career paths and fields of work. More recently, Doyle and Locke (2014) affirmed that school district personnel *infrequently* recruit outside of the pool of "state-certified public-school educators" (p. 3). When district staff attempted recruitment otherwise, it was challenging to find qualified candidates (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Due to the lack of qualified candidates, districts need to look beyond the traditional recruiting pool (Lemoine et al., 2018).

In 2019 in the United States, 18.8 million men and women were veterans accounting for about 8% of the civilian noninstitutional population aged 18 and over (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In K-12 education, there is an existing base of military veterans to recruit educational leaders. In 2017, 2.5% of teachers in the United States were veterans, and 3.2% of teachers in the South were veterans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Using the leadership skills developed in the military, these veterans can assume administrative roles within local educational agencies.

## PRINCIPAL SHORTAGE

Principals and assistant principals serve vital roles in K-12 educational settings, including influencing school culture, motivating students and teachers, and affecting student academic achievement (Bolles & Patrizio, 2016; Day et al., 2016; Dutta & Sahney, 2016). As critical as principals and assistant principals are, retaining effective administrators has been a challenge. In the United States (US), 18% of principals are no longer in the same position 1 year later. Currently, 35% of principals are at their schools for less than 2 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). With increasing accountability measures, job complexities, lack of support from the central office, and low compensation, many principals choose not to stay in education (Fuller & Young, 2009).

US veterans can be recruited to be future educational leaders (e.g., principals and assistant principals) based on their military experience and leadership development. The recruitment and utilization of the veteran population of North Carolina is an untapped supply of school-based administrators. Can the US military veteran base be used to recruit future educational leaders? This phenomenological study aimed to explore principals' and assistant principals' military experience and leadership development in North Carolina.

## PILLARS OF PRINCIPALSHIP

The theoretical framework for this study encompasses Schneider and Burton's (2008) four pillars of principalship: leadership, management, pedagogy, and the personal intelligences. The traditional character pillars of principalship have evolved to leadership, management, pedagogy, and *emotional literacy* for principals today (Schneider & Burton, 2008; Schneider & Yitzhak-Monsonego, 2020). Emotional literacy consists of both intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence (Schneider & Burton, 2008). Intrapersonal intelligence refers to the ability to understand oneself and effectively use that understanding in life. Interpersonal intelligence refers to understanding others, including social dynamics, and effectively interacting with them. To be influential leaders, principals must foster relationships among various stakeholders, such as teachers, central office staff, and the school community (Fu et al., 2010; Muse & Abrams, 2011). The four pillars of principalship were used in this study to provide a framework to understand how military experience influences educational leaders.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of relevant literature documents the conceptual and empirical foundations that support the link between military experience and principal leadership in the US. Additionally, the literature covers recruiting military veterans for administrative positions, programs for veterans to enter the field of education, and the rationale for examining how military experience influences educational leaders in North Carolina.

### RECRUITING MILITARY VETERANS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

The US military develops leaders who make command decisions, work in teams, and motivate people (Kane, 2012). Yet, there is a dearth of research on the impact military experience has on the demonstrated leadership of educational leaders. For example, in a survey of education administrator supervisors, Owings and colleagues (2011) found that military veterans who were teachers and became administrators were overwhelmingly proficient in key areas compared to non-veteran administrators. In comparison, Johnson's (2018) qualitative study on 18 K-12 school administrators/military veterans revealed that military experience greatly influenced their educational leadership. He found that skills developed in the military were beneficial to them as school leaders, including time management, critical thinking, and interpersonal

communication. However, participants found challenges reverting to military training and felt less support in leadership development in the school setting than in the military.

In a qualitative study on principals who were former military officers in Israel, Ghilay (2004) reported that military experience affected people orientation (i.e., creation of effective relationships with groups and individuals) and relevance of organization (i.e., managerial skills). These findings are substantiated by research on military experience and principalship in Israel (Schneider, 2004; Schneider & Barkol, 2007; Schneider & Burton, 2005 & 2008). More specifically, Schneider and Burton (2008) showed principals with military experience perceived personal intelligence at a higher rate. In addition, they had more developed leadership and management skills than teachers who became principals through non-military-related pre-training programs. More recently, Bolles and Patrizio (2016) conducted a multi-case study with 15 military veterans working as educational leaders. Findings indicated that (a) leaders' military and educational experience informed their leadership style, (b) focusing on people was essential, as was (c) having a belief in service, and (d) possessing leadership and accountability (Bolles & Patrizio, 2016).

The extant literature on veterans in administrative leadership roles has not focused on the positions of individuals in the military. The phenomenon of military experience and a service member's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), and how it influences school administrator's leadership development needs further examination. MOS is a code of letters and numbers that indicate the job a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) or Officer has in the Army and Marines (US Army, 2010; Marine Corps MOS Codes, 2017). Military service varies greatly depending on specialty and rank, influencing if and how leadership styles are influenced.

## PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS TO ENTER THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Due to the lack of empirical literature and a Retraining Military Officers Program (RMOP) in the US, we focused on the RMOP in Israel as a foundation for the study. Scholars examining the RMOP (Barkol, 1996; Schneider & Burton, 2005; Schneider & Barkol, 2007; Schneider & Burton, 2008) provided great insight into the potential of how military experiences can impact principalship since this research does not exist in the US. Personnel of RMOP established a 2-year pre-service training program that assisted retired military officers' transitions into education leadership by completing necessary teacher training within the first year and administrative training during the second year of the program (Barkol, 1996; Ghilay, 2004; Schneider, 2004;

Schneider & Barkol, 2007; Schneider & Burton, 2005, 2008). However, studies on RMOP only focused on officers and excluded the leadership development and experiences of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). Hess and Kelly (2005) contend that the RMOP is a "boutique program" (p. 177), and further research is needed to understand how military experience influences the leadership development of school administrators.

Within the US, there is no RMOP for veterans. The closest entity is the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program (Owings et al., 2011, 2015), which provided financial assistance to veterans who entered high-needs teaching areas and committed to teaching in those fields for 3 years. However, unlike the RMOP, veterans in the TTT program did not receive pre-service administrative training (Owings et al., 2011). Notably, of the TTT teachers who became administrators, 91% of their supervisors rated TTT administrators overwhelmingly as proficient and distinguished on evaluation standards compared to their peers with similar years of school leadership experience. Also, the researchers found that the participants possessed skills like those in the RMOP program, including leadership, management, organization, motivation, discipline, and ability to work with diverse populations (Owings et al., 2011, 2015). Furthermore, Owings et al. (2015) reported principals' satisfaction with TTT-trained teachers, including their work ethic, ability to utilize research-based instructional practices, and successful classroom management with diverse learners in various academic settings.

Personnel transitioning out of the military represent a potential pool of talented, educated, and disciplined employees (Levy & Nystrom, 2015). However, with little research conducted in the US (Owings, Kaplan, & Chappell, 2011; Owings, Kaplan, Khrabrova & Chappell, 2015), and limited research conducted in Israel (e.g., Ghilay, 2004; Schneider, 2004; Schneider & Barkol, 2007; Schneider & Burton, 2005, 2008), the phenomenon of military experience and its influence on the leadership development of school-based administration needs to be studied. This research can occur in states with large numbers of veterans, such as North Carolina.

## MILITARY EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN NORTH CAROLINA

In North Carolina, inadequate incentives, regulatory restrictions, and other issues mirroring national administrative shortages are a concern that continually impact the supply and demand of school principals (Principals' Executive Program, 2006). On average, North Carolina needs 280 new principals per year, which has proved difficult with the high turnover rate (Burkhauser et al., 2012; Clifford & Chiang, 2016). In addition, North

Carolina has the fourth largest military population in the country (Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, 2019). North Carolina contains over 102,000 active-duty personnel at bases throughout the state (Thrive in North Carolina, 2011).

Over 666,000 veterans reside in North Carolina (Tippett, 2018). North Carolina has eight military installations (Strategic Plan for Supporting and Enhancing North Carolina Military Missions and Instillations, 2016). Nearly 78,000 military personnel will enter the civilian workforce, with 82% of those 30 years old or younger (Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, 2017). In 2015, veterans represented significant populations in Cumberland (20.6%), Hoke (19.5%), Craven (18.7%), and Currituck (15.7%) counties (Tippett, 2015). Veterans within these counties can fill the administrative void within these counties and address administrative shortages within surrounding counties. The vast number of veterans who could transition into the educational workforce would ease North Carolina's need for an average of 280 new principals a year (Principals' Executive Program, 2006).

## METHODOLOGY

Given the need for school-based administrators and a large number of veterans in North Carolina, this study explored how military experience influenced the leadership development of school-based administrators. The research questions were:

1. How does military experience influence the leadership development of principals and assistant principals?
2. How does the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) influence the leadership development of principals and assistant principals with military experience?

## SETTING

While nine counties hosted military installations, in North Carolina, six counties did not have participants that met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Another county was excluded from the investigation due to the Institutional Review policies set locally. Therefore, this study involved veterans from two North Carolina counties with military installations and high veteran populations (approximately 18–20%). Within these two counties, it was required to get permission from the school districts to conduct this research.

## SAMPLING

While the sampling size of phenomenological studies can range from one to 325 participants (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dukes, 1984; Reimen, 1986), this study included six participants. In this study, the researchers used a purposeful sampling method (Creswell, 2013). The criteria for selection were a principal or assistant principal with a minimum of 4 years of military service, as a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) or Officer in any branch of military service through service in Armed Services, Reserves, or National Guard Units associated with the United States. Participants were included regardless of degree attained, years of service in education, and the school level in which they served as principal or assistant principal.

Participants included six school-based administrators, including one that was retired (see *Table 1*). Three (50%) of the participants were principals, two (33%) assistant principals, and the sole (17%) retiree served as an assistant principal and principal. The participants' years of service in public education (teaching and administration) ranged from 12 to 24 years. The participants served in varied public educational leadership levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high school). Four of the six participants (67%) were White and two (33%) were Black. Five of the participants were male (83%) and one was female.

| PARTICIPANT | ETHNICITY | GENDER | MILITARY YEARS OF SERVICE | EDUCATIONAL YEARS OF SERVICE | SCHOOL LEVEL TAUGHT | SCHOOL ADMIN. LEVEL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Principal 1 | White | Male | 21 | 17 | Elem. | Elem. |
| Principal 2 | White | Female | 20 | 21 | Middle | Middle |
| Principal 3 | White | Male | 21 | 24 | Middle | Elem. & High |
| Assistant Principal 1 | Black | Male | 28 | 12 | Middle | Middle |
| Assistant Principal 2 | Black | Male | 22 | 17 | High | High |
| Retiree 1 | White | Male | 20 | 22 | High | High & Middle (after retirement) |

**Table 1** Participant Information.

## MILITARY EXPERIENCE

The six participants had 20 or more years of military experience. Four of the participants (67%) served in the Army, while two participants (33%) served in the Marine Corps (see *Table 2*). Three of the six participants (50%) served as NCOs, while two participants (33%) served their entire military career as officers. One principal (17%) joined the military as an NCO and transitioned into the officer cadre through a direct commission as a Second Lieutenant and retired as a Major. *Table 2* shows each participant's branch, rank, and MOS of the participants MOS designation with their description of the duties associated with the specialty.

## DATA COLLECTION

In spring 2019, the primary researcher collected data for this study. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The open-ended questions provided participants with narrative opportunities (Riessman, 2008). In total, 14 interview questions were used, including (a) describe your military experience, and (b) how did you decide to enter the educational field?

## PROCEDURE

Before the interviews occurred, the primary researcher described the study to each participant and obtained informed consent. The participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Each 60 to 90-minute interview occurred at the interviewee's schools, except for the retiree who could not meet in person. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (Dukes, 1984; Riemen, 1986; van Manen, 1990, 2017).

## DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers used Huberman and Miles' (1994) nine-step process for data analysis in this study. For instance, the researchers wrote notes in the margins of each transcript. From the interview transcripts, the primary researcher established codes and patterns. The frequency of codes from direct quotes was used to establish a logical chain of evidence. Once this was completed, the researchers made comparisons, and structural and textural descriptions were created. Through this analytical strategy, themes regarding the phenomenon of military experience and principal development in North Carolina emerged (Huberman & Miles, 1994, 2002).

## DEPENDABILITY, CREDIBILITY, TRANSFERABILITY, AND CONFORMABILITY

Dependability was established through systematic and consistent use of the same interview protocol (Huberman & Miles, 1994, 2002). The participants were identified and described accurately by following established protocols, ensuring dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Taping and transcribing the interviews prevented data loss, thereby building a chain of evidence that reinforced credibility (Stewart et al., 2017). Credibility relied upon transparency, systematic procedures, and adherence to evidence (Yin, 2011). For transferability to occur, the structural and textural descriptions were bound by a logical chain of evidence (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Data triangulation (UNAIDS, n.d.) and detailed descriptions corroborated

| PARTICIPANT | BRANCH | RANK | MOS | DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Principal 1 | Army | First Sergeant E8 | 35 Whiskey | Military Intelligence – "I was an electronic technician managing the workflow of how many radios or whatever electronic equipment we got in to repair." |
| Principal 2 | Army Reserves | Major O4 | 38 Alpha (NCO), 35 Delta (Officer) | 38 Alpha-Civil Affairs, liaison between Army and civilian authorities. 35 Delta-All Source Intelligence, oversees all aspects of all-source intel and counter-intel, supervises intel prep of the battlefield. |
| Principal 3 | Marine Corps | Major O4 | 0302, 0180 | "Initially, I was an infantry officer. … [Then] I was the adjutant at headquarters and service battalion." Coordinate admin matters, supervise the execution of administrative policies. |
| Assistant Principal 1 | Army | Sergeant Major E9 | 92 Field | "MOS was within the quartermaster field a 92 series, which is quartermaster unit logistics." |
| Assistant Principal 2 | Army | Sergeant First Class E7 | 91 Bravo | "91 Bravo, which is just a basic combat medic. … I decided to become what the Army calls a practical nurse." |
| Retiree 1 | Marine Corps | Lt. Colonel O5 | 2502, 7562 | "My MOS, initially, was 2502 communications officer. And then my next MOS, once I went to flight school, was 7562 CH-46 pilot, and I flew the C-12, which is the Beech King Air, Super King Air." |

**Table 2** Participant's Branch, Rank, and Military Operations Specialty (MOS).

evidence from the interviews, providing validity to the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data accurately represented the information provided by the participants and not devised by the interviewer, assuring confirmability (Polit & Beck, 2012).

## RESULTS

Study analysis revealed 39 codes that were then grouped into the eight categories: (a) personal intelligence, (b) leadership, (c) management, (d) obstacles, (e) special programs, (f) pedagogy, (g) transition, and (h) accountability. Finally, the categories collapsed and three themes resulted: (1) accountability to family, superiors, and subordinates; (2) special programs aiding with transitions; and (3) Military Occupational Specialties versus Military Training. The themes are described and exemplified through representative quotations.

### ACCOUNTABILITY TO FAMILY, SUPERIORS, AND SUBORDINATES

Accountability to family, superiors, and subordinates was the first theme. During military service, service members spend countless hours away from their families and loved ones. The participants revealed that they wanted to spend more time with their families after separation from the service. Due to the missed time with family members while serving in the military, the field of education allowed them to spend the time they desired with their families while still providing for them financially.

All participants stated that they had to learn how to communicate differently with a teacher than with their fellow soldiers. However, communicating effectively with teachers helped participants develop empathy and unite the community. In addition, dealing with all different ideologies of people within the military allowed all participants to be accountable to superiors and subordinates.

While military training created stronger connections within a community, participants had to change their thought processes in the educational setting due to a difference in expectations regarding teamwork and accountability. Principal 1 said, "some faculty members did not share the same goals and visions regarding school operational needs and student success." Participants were mindful that they could talk to soldiers one way compared to staff members. In the military, Assistant Principal 1 mentioned, "you are accountable and responsible for what was placed under your command and leadership, whether it is [human] beings or bullets, whether it is Privates or NCOs. You are responsible to those above and below you."

Principal 2 stated, "When creating a positive school culture for the adults, one is designed for the students in each classroom." The shift from a more structured military environment to a less controlled educational one caused the participants to develop empathy that influenced their understanding and desire to increase student's, faculty's, and staff's overall morale, creating cohesion with the surrounding school community. Two Senior NCO participants (Assistant Principal 1 and Assistant Principal 2) stated that a leader does not ask subordinates or others to do something they are not willing to do themselves. The participants' military experience also influenced their accountability to people. According to Principal 3:

> I project what I expect my staff to do and do what is expected of them. The leadership qualities are modeling for students and being honest with students. You can't be their friend, but we can have a dialogue.

The participants used these skills associated with leadership and applied them to management as well. The military allowed the participants to become good stewards of different resources and people through strict adherence to policies and procedures during their service. Assistant Principal (AP) 1 stated:

> It boiled down to one thing, accountability. So being accountable and being responsible for what has been placed under your command under your leadership, whether it's beings or bullets, whether it's Privates or NCOs, at the end of the day, you are responsible.

While all participants recognized the importance of sharing pedagogy, all made it clear that the methods to disseminate military pedagogy are different from sharing educational pedagogy. For example, Principal 3 noted that in the military, "You have a captive audience. They're there because they have to be there. They're there to listen and it's part of their job to listen to that piece. Whereas in education you'll get who you get." Participants stated that to bridge this gap, they had to develop personal intelligence on dealing with personalities and learning abilities that differed from their own. However, some participants stated that the military structure made the development of personal intelligence less of a priority than following policies and procedures. Participants indicated growing as a leader by dealing with different personalities and leadership styles. They worked with superiors and subordinates to complete the objectives and missions. Principal 2 detailed that the military:

Really introduced me to working with and having to build a team around people who were different from me. That is something I think that has resonated with me. It also taught me that there are different perspectives in everything that you do. So even though I might view something one way, people who come from different experiences might look at my way and think that I'm crazy and do something totally different, and their way may be better. It just opened my eyes to taking in all different perspectives in education, having a sense of empathy, trying to figure out where other people come from.

Also, two participants clearly stated that their transition from the military to public education was lacking guidance and if it was not for a transitional program such as TTT, they would not have been as successful.

## SPECIAL PROGRAMS AIDING WITH TRANSITIONS

Transitions from military leadership to civilian leadership are linked. Two participants completed the TTT to reduce the financial burden of transitioning from their military career to their educational one. Principal 3 stated that TTT "provided the salary to the county for me" for the 5 years they were with the program, while Assistant Principal 1 clearly stated that "TTT really gave me a gateway for that transition. It helped me financially towards that transition." Principal 3 shared that TTT advocated for military service members by eliciting their feedback regarding obstacles they faced while transitioning into lateral entry teaching positions through the use of questionnaires as. Two participants' had concerns about how pay and years of experience vary significantly from other educational areas that gain recognition, such as career/technical and education through the state licensing process. According to Principal 3, the "biggest obstacle I had was they took none of my military experience for credit. Because I did not do it in a classroom. What they say as a classroom setting, a traditional setting, we got no credit."

## MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTIES VERSUS MILITARY TRAINING

Participants were explicitly asked how their progression through their MOS influenced their leadership, personal intelligence, management, and pedagogy (i.e., four pillars of school principalship established by Schneider and Burton, 2008). Participants discussed their military experiences rather than their specific MOS. The participants saw few connections between their MOS and the four pillars of school principalship. Principals 2 and 3 saw no relationship between their MOS and the four pillars, and

no participant saw an influence on personal intelligence. Assistant Principal 1 was the only participant who saw how their MOS influenced their leadership, although they spoke more to personal motivation than skill development. He described applying the incentive to progress through the ranks quickly to his career in education:

In my MOS, I started as an E1, that is, a Private. And as I progressed in the military, I questioned, what's the next level? Then from that next level, what is the highest level that I could attain within the military, so I used that same concept within education.

Three participants had examples of how their MOS influenced the management pillar. Principal 1, a senior NCO, said his MOS prepared him for management regarding "everything from being a squad leader in charge of five to six people, to when I took over the electronic shop." He had to manage the flow of the equipment in and out of repair. Assistant Principal 1 and Retiree 1 also discussed the management skills related to equipment and logistics. Assistant Principal 1 applied the skillset in their educational leadership position, comparing managing classroom equipment and bus logistics. In respect to pedagogy, four participants recounted specific courses they completed to progress through MOS ranks. As the participants discussed their schooling, their responses became more generalized to training, classes, and schools that transcended their MOS. Their statements were associated with military training in general. Participants did not connect their MOS directly to their educational leadership positions.

Military training influenced the leadership development of participants who became school-based administrators. Whether enlisted or officers, the participants stated the constant placement in leadership positions throughout the progression of rank and the continual schooling ensured that they had the necessary leadership skills to work with people of different beliefs and work habits. In addition, respondents' military training enforced the need for adherence to policies and procedures, all while teaching them to develop the human capital within the subordinates they oversee while mitigating the extemporaneous chaos that occurs while completing the mission set forth by commanders and senior NCOs.

All participants touched on the notion that the military sends personnel to schools and trains them to make sure personnel know what they are doing within their leadership and MOS. Retiree 1 said, "as military training progresses, responsibilities increase through the ranks as military personnel are sent to school and must apply leadership [skills]. [They apply] procedural content learned from school regardless of MOS." Assistant Principal 1 shared,

the "military focuses on career progression wherein young soldiers that have the potential for the next level of responsibility are allowed to lead and advance." Retiree 1 further explained, "Military training consistently sends personnel to advanced schooling that prepares personnel for future advancement and the subsequent leadership position." As Assistant Principal 1 stated:

> As one progresses through training and rank, responsibilities grow. Within the military model, there is the systematic belief that leaders are sent to school and are returned to units and apply their knowledge to be vetted for promotion to senior leadership positions.

Assistant Principal 2 said, "the military has a strong focus on policies and procedures to handle both operational and administrative tasks." Meanwhile, Assistant Principal 1 relayed, "If policies and procedures are not followed, consequences ensue. Lessons learned from the military that have prepared participants for life in public education would be organization and drilling policies and procedures as a young soldier (teacher)." This type of systemic training allowed participants to do paperwork and evaluations consistently with meeting operational needs while also providing opportunities for human capital development. Based on military training, the military taught all participants how to document soldiers, adequately counsel soldiers, and maintain soldier development. Principal 2 stated that the military trained them on "the importance of knowing what is right, how to do things, asking questions, seeking out clarification, and then doing the right thing all of the time."

Military training means one trains others to do your job; however, in the military experience structure, one learns from their NCOs and Officers as junior leaders. According to Assistant Principal 1, "the junior leaders then take what is best about this NCO or Officer to become the next person standing up." Principal 3 affirmed this concept by stating, "there is the next man up." Participants used the skills learned to manage people in the military and trust people below them. To continue to build human capacity, Assistant Principal 2 stated:

> Teachers are like soldiers. If they can believe in what you're trying to accomplish, they will follow you through anything. In the military, you check out who your subordinates are and listen to them, ensuring you can get a better outcome. Everybody's replaceable, but you have to make sure the next man up knows what you know and do so that they can take over your job. In the military, every time

> one stepped up, it brought more responsibility. However, one had to delegate authority to train those under you to help others move up.

Regardless of military or civilian leadership positions, participants learned from absorbing and watching, being on the receiving end of many different types of leadership. As they understand one set of leadership styles, it does not preclude one from being a successful leader in all situations. Situational leadership dominates both military and public education.

## DISCUSSION

This study extended previous research (Ghilay, 2004; Levy & Nystrom, 2015; Sergiovanni, 1995; Schneider & Burton, 2008) by investigating how the military experience influenced school-based administrators' leadership development in North Carolina. The two research questions framed the discussion.

### MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTIES

Previously, researchers did not examine the influence MOS had on school-based administrators' leadership development (e.g., Schneider & Burton, 2008). In this study, the six participants provided perceptual and foundational information on how MOS and military experience influenced the leadership development of school-based administrators in North Carolina. The findings revealed that specific a MOS did not influence the participants' leadership development. However, military training did impact the leadership development from their military career to a career in public education.

### MILITARY EXPERIENCE INFLUENCES LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In this phenomenological study, school-based administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals) indicated that broad military experience influenced leadership development, supporting previous research (Johnson, 2018; Owings et al., 2011). The study confirmed that military experience influenced participants' interpersonal and managerial skills. The results further substantiated Schneider and Burton's (2008) contention that military experience affects the leadership development of principals, specifically that their expertise leads to the development of management, pedagogy, and personal intelligence skills. Schneider and Burton's research (2005, 2008) focused solely on officers. At the same time, participants for this research included half of senior NCOs ($n$ = 3), which expands on previous research that focused

only on officers transitioning 18-year-olds into educational leadership roles (Schneider & Burton, 2005, 2008).

In this study, participants confirmed that interpersonal skills included balancing the internal organization and the external communities they serve by approaching all stakeholders as valuable contributors (Fu et al., 2010). Military experience develops managerial, leadership, pedagogical, and personal intelligence skills, which are transferable skills for the career of principalship. However, military training (which is more direct and akin to doing as you are told and shown) differs from educational training. Veterans need assistance with crossing over, not only with teaching a curriculum but also with classroom management, which varies by age. Therefore, a program like TTT needs to be a financial assistance program while a transitional guidance program similar to NC Principal Fellows (NC Principal Fellows Program, 2021) and the Leadership Consortium (Leadership Consortium, 2021) that accelerate leadership development.

## IMPLICATIONS

The implications for public school educational decision-makers include:

- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) personnel can develop a survey for school-based administrators with military experience to identify obstacles and needs specific to their development within the educational setting. This information could be used to help increase the number of veterans in educational leadership and assist with the transition.
- Human resource department staff can develop local plans that aid veterans in transitioning into the educational setting from the military environment. While TTT focuses on financial resources to aid in one's transition from the military to public education, another developmental support is needed to assist with the change, such as classroom management, accountability measures, or other areas such as exceptional children support.
- Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) with large numbers of administrators with military experience could develop support systems/mentor programs for these administrators similar to those for beginning teachers (Beginning teacher support, NC DPI, 2021) or the North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies (Brown, 2014) to assist with transitional concerns and address human capital development. Military leaders deal with fluid situations and must learn to develop the human capital within their staff regardless of what educational

level they teach. Additionally, LEAs must assist with the transition of military leaders in dealing with the developmental concerns of students as military leaders are accustomed to working with colleagues aged 18 and older.
- Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) could work with LEAs and NCDPI to identify their role in the education and development of veterans as they transition into the educational setting. IHEs must look at developmental programs to increase the leadership potential and effectiveness of those transitioning from military service to public educational service in North Carolina. Other public educational leadership initiatives exist (e.g., NC Principal Fellows).

## LIMITATIONS

Two of nine counties with military installations in NC are represented in this study. Also, the six participants were from two of the five military branches and certain ranks. Unfortunately, in North Carolina, there is no database to identify school-based administrators with military experience. Therefore, by focusing on the selected counties in North Carolina, the researchers identified participants who exhibited the necessary criteria, which was paramount (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 2017) to establish the foundation for future research.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

While informative, this study leaves many unanswered questions and fails to control other factors when exploring how the military experience influenced school-based administrators' leadership development. In the future, scholars can focus on veterans who studied education (e.g., showing both a predisposition to education as a career as well as training other service members would lack). Similar studies can be conducted in other North Carolina counties and other states with high veterans or military installations to substantiate or dispel results, especially on rank and service branches. Another recommendation is for researchers to ask superintendents their perceptions about school-based administrators' military experience and leadership development. In the future, scholars can examine how military training doctrine could be used to specifically identify leadership development opportunities and training that can aid in the transition for veterans who transition into educational leadership. This research can significantly assist civilian school-based administrators while also easing the transition for veterans into those roles.

## CONCLUSION

Given the participants' perceptions, military training allows veterans to learn skills that translate effectively into the school administrative domain, including leadership, management, personal intelligence, pedagogy, and interpersonal skills. Therefore, educational leaders in North Carolina and beyond should continue to enhance their understanding of how to effectively harness this population to meet the demand for school administrators.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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