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AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN AN ARMY ROTC PROGRAM

by

Joseph O Gagnon

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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Dissertation Chair: Jo Ann B Manning, Ed.D., Professor, Department of Educational Leadership

Committee Members:
James Coaxum III, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership
Mark A Piterski, Ph.D., President, Military Consulting-PMC LLC

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Dedications

This work is dedicated to God and all those special people in my life who supported me through this journey. First and foremost, this work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through Him all things are possible. I know he is leading me down this path to support his greater mission.

I am dedicating this to my loving spouse Lucia who supported me throughout this journey and encouraged me so many times to keep going. Her persistence and support were my driving force to see this through to completion.

I am dedicating this to my daughters Sierra and Rio Marie. We always speak about the importance of education and pursuing excellence in everything we do. We continuously challenge each other to make each of us better. Iron sharpens iron.

Lastly, I am dedicating this work to my parents who are in heaven. I know they are looking down, smiling and cheering for me. They encouraged continuous education for both my brother and I with our dad leading by example late into his retirement years.

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Lastly, I am grateful for my friend, Dr. Tracy Norman, with whom I started this program together. His friendship and encouragement got me to the finish line. Thank you!

Abstract

Joseph O Gagnon
AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN AN ARMY ROTC PROGRAM
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Jo Ann B. Manning, Ed.D.
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Understanding the learning behaviors for young leaders from Generation Z is important for the United States Army in their development for future commissioned officers, who are primarily trained in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in select private and public universities across the country. The Army expectation of leaders at every level regardless of rank are to possess and continuously develop six leadership capabilities codified in the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ALRM). The ALRM describes what an Army leader is (i.e., the attributes) and what an Army leader does (i.e., the competencies). The purpose of this study was to understand how Generation Z Army ROTC cadets describe and interpret their leadership development experience. This qualitative study used interpretive phenomenological analysis with a constructivist worldview and experiential learning theory to provide detailed examinations of lived personal experience of the ROTC cadets with a central theme of leadership development. Eight research participants were interviewed for the study while they were completing their senior Military Science Level IV year in the ROTC program. The participants gave insights into transitioning to a leader's mindset, acquiring durable leadership attributes and competencies including leading by example, confidence, adaptability, resilience, emotional intelligence, and the impact of peer leadership on their leadership development.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

College student leadership development is presented in numerous formats, which often challenges educators to find the format to provide the most durable results for learning outcomes. The number of leadership development programs and opportunities has increased on college campuses steadily over the years, but the key is pairing the proper developmental learning strategy to the proper population or generation of learner. The learning approach layered with practical experiential opportunities are essential to supporting every university value system to provide high quality leaders to society upon graduation. Hastings and McElravy (2020) noted it is critical to study the traits and behaviors of young leaders and the need for earlier leadership development experiences, as over half of all management occupations will be transferred to a younger generation in the next 20 years. Understanding these learning behaviors are equally important for the United States Army in their development for future commissioned officers, who are primarily trained in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at select private and public universities across the country.

ROTC Overview, Army Leadership Requirements Model, Cadet Summer Training

The overarching goal of the Army ROTC program is to develop effective leaders with training designed to prepare cadets to commission as second lieutenants at the completion of the program. According to Mele (2020), each year, more than 5,000 cadets complete Army ROTC and join the Army profession serving either on active duty (i.e., full-time) or in the reserve component (i.e., part-time). U.S. Army Cadet Command is the governing body for Army ROTC. The organization's strategic vision is to ensure each

university ROTC program is staffed with specially selected professional cadre and staff fully prepared to train and educate a diverse group of cadets from across the nation to become adaptive leaders, agile thinkers, and problem solvers committed to the Profession of Arms (Army Cadet Command Headquarters, 2018). Although leadership development is important in all professions, Army ROTC instructors understand the cadets they train to become future officers, who will have a profound level of responsibility because of the use of deadly force, the consequences of the decisions they make can impact their Soldiers, families, the enemy and the use of national resources (Mele, 2020).

The Army expectation of leaders at every level regardless of rank are to possess and continuously develop six leadership capabilities codified in the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ALRM). The ALRM describes what an Army leader is (i.e., the attributes) and what an Army leader does (i.e., the competencies; Army Doctrinal Reference Publication [ADRP], 2012). According to Gilson et al. (2015), the ALRM consists of attributes including three subdimensions of character, presence, and intellectual capability, whereas competencies incorporate the more action-oriented items of leads, develops, and achieves. Army ROTC cadets are assessed in their leadership development program based on these subdimensions of the leadership attributes and competencies. Gilson et al. (2015) further explained the ROTC curriculum and training include numerous hands-on leadership opportunities including physical fitness training and testing, land navigation training, confidence courses, and tactical and situational training exercises, which challenge the Cadets throughout the semesters. Evaluations, assessments, and peer reviews are ongoing throughout the semesters and culminates after the Military Science III (MSIII) year, when all ROTC cadets attend the cadet summer

training (CST). During this month-long course, the cadets are evaluated on the same training opportunities they had on campus with the added variable of working with unfamiliar cadets from universities around the country. Gilson et al. (2015) explained the aforementioned leadership requirement model serves as the template for the assessment process. Specifically, ROTC Cadre complete Blue Card evaluations consisting of 19 leadership dimensions for cadets focused on their leadership presence, intellectual capability, application of leadership principles, developing subordinates, and achieving the mission.

The Army ROTC program implements both experiential student-centered learning and peer leadership in its on-campus program. The experiential andragogy is active in the military science lab, internships, training schools, other on-campus experiences including intensive assessment and feedback. According to Mele (2020), the military science labs associated with each military science level are generally 90–120 minutes each week of hands-on practical application and assessment of leadership while performing various military tasks. The on-campus experimental development ensures cadet leaders and staff are responsible for every aspect of the program's training and administration, just as their classmates might serve on the university's student body government. Assigned to positions for usually 1 semester, these cadets lead the day-to-day activities of the ROTC program such as information dissemination and accountability and the planning, preparation, and execution of daily physical training, periodic equipment inventories, hosting of visitors, military ceremonies, transportation, logistics, marksmanship training, and multiday training exercises. In addition to the previously mentioned CST after the Military Science Level 3 year, cadets have the opportunity to attend internships and other

active-duty Army training courses such as Airborne or Air Assault Schools where they are immersed in training and can learn valuable leadership lessons (Army Cadet Command Headquarters, 2018). Finally, leadership development and assessment are continuous throughout the cadets' time in the ROTC program. Mele (2020) explained after nearly every event a collective after-action review is conducted to assess the effectiveness of the organizational and leader actions. Individual leaders are counseled using a standard leadership assessment form that captures key observations that sustain and improve the leader's overall behavior and impact on mission and Soldiers. Similarly, peer evaluations are completed using the attributes and competencies of the ALRM as evaluation metrics. The cadre and peer assessments help identify leadership trends, strengths, and weaknesses to inform tailored mentoring and future duty assignments for experience and growth.

Background

The prominent student population entering institutions of higher education today is represented by Generation Z. This generation brings different learning characteristics and expectations to the classroom. They are confident, optimistic, goal and achievement focused, team oriented, fast decision makers, and highly connected (Cilliers, 2017). They are keen observers and are comfortable with autonomy and self-paced learning but prefer group learning. They prefer engagement in the classroom over lecture—learning by doing. Implementing an effective leadership development program for this generation, which can increase learning capacities for students of the latest generation requires two critical components. The first component is to provide a form of andragogy, which can create an environment where learning is easier. Leadership is a learned activity and a

desired outcome in higher education. Applying effective teaching methods are integral to providing durable effects for leadership development today. Traditional andragogy is no longer sufficient for a generation that emphasizes learning over teaching (Wilson, 2004). Teacher-centered instruction or direct instruction in which lecture is the dominant teaching method can limit educational development and place students in a more passive role as a learner (Bligh, 1998). Bui and Alfaro (2011) found teacher-centered learning prompted more negative attitudes toward learning certain topics. Although lecture is effective in transmitting information, it is inefficient in promoting thought (Bligh, 1998). The second component, which supports active student learning is to incorporate peer leadership into the program, where students provide critical instruction and support to each other. Peers have a significant impact on college student development, and in turn, have an impact on the students' leadership development (Brown, 1972). Both Terenzini et al. (1996) and Brown (1972) agree that a holistic approach enhances student leadership development. The collective of educators, the curriculum, coaches, advisors, and peers impact overall student leadership development.

Student-Centered Learning

Student-centered learning provides an experimental learning methodology, which may fill that role and provide students durable leadership characteristics. Student-centered androgyny increases critical thinking, learning abstract concepts, and the development of cognitive skills when participating in activities or doing hands-on skills (Elder & Paul, 2004). Research has found positive correlations between the use of student-centered learning and student self-efficacy and student performance and achievement (Ross et al., 2001). Wright (2011) indicated student-centered learning shifts

the decision making in a class to empower the students, and the role of the teacher moves from “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side.” Students are no longer passive absorbers of the information but are actively engaged in the learning process and often include peer learning activities.

Peer Leadership

Brown (1972) emphasized the dominant and single most important force for student intellectual development and vocational choice remains the peer group. However, contradictory research (Frost, 1981; Mathieu, 1990) reported peer support buffered the maladaptive responses to ambiguous tasks assigned by leaders and additionally found that affiliation did not influence leadership behavior or subordinate satisfaction. Subsequent research on peer support found those who were uncertain about a task gained more benefit from peer support than those with a firm grip on a task who sought more autonomy (Bass & Bass, 2008; Rast et al., 2012).

According to Frade and Tiroyabone (2017), peer leadership is beneficial to both the students serving in the leadership role and the students they support. Frade and Tiroyabone (2017) reported improvements in peer leaders’ communication and leadership skills, more interaction with teaching staff, professors and peers, greater engagement in critical thinking, and diverse problem solving and refined interpersonal skills. Peer leaders are perceived as more approachable and less judgmental than an authority figure (Cuseo, 2010).

Problem Statement

I served in multiple capacities over a 29-year military career working with and supporting both junior and senior level Army ROTC programs, which include 4 years as

a ROTC cadet, 4 years as a ROTC instructor at Seton Hall University, and 4 years as an administrator/supervisor for multiple university ROTC programs. During this timeframe, although there have been small changes to the ROTC curriculum, structure, and Cadet Command Leadership Development Program, the focus remains delivering leadership development across four major learning areas: Army leadership and the profession, mission command, human dimension, and professional competence (Mele, 2020). The significant change has been in the generation of cadet who have participated in the program. This generational shift most recently from the millennial generation to Generation Z challenges the ROTC andragogy and more recently, challenges to military recruiting (Baldor, 2022). The arrival of Generation Z students on college campuses as early as 2013 has caused universities to pivot from millennials to focus on the new generational cohort. This shift makes it necessary for educators to understand the characteristics and learning styles of this new generation (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018). Cilliers (2017) explained the rise in the new Generation Z, which speak a more technological language, has created new challenges in the teaching–learning environment in colleges and universities today, which has increased the complexity of instruction, guidance, and supervision. Generation Z students in universities today learn and interact differently (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). This new generation prefers to engage in hands-on learning opportunities to immediately apply what they learn to real life (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Additionally, the United States Army missed it's recruiting goal by 15,000 recruits, which is 25% of its recruiting mission for fiscal year 2022, and other military cohorts reported recruiting below their typical projections for fiscal year 2023 (Baldor, 2022). Baldor (2022) explained in addition to the 2 years of limited access for recruiters

to schools because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the recruiting problem is exacerbated by the fact that slightly less than 23% of all Generation Z high school students can meet the military fitness, educational, and moral standards. Many more are disqualified due to medical and criminal issues. Of those students who do qualify, the percentage of Generation Z students who desire to serve continues to decrease (Baldor, 2022). The Army needs to adapt its recruiting efforts to understand the current generation and, equally as important, the ROTC programs, which train over 80% of all new officers, needs to remain current in their leadership training methods. Understanding what influences Generation Z students is key to successful recruiting for this generation (Dearden et al., 2014).

Generation Z students are the population in today's ROTC programs across the country. The combination of the experimental learning form of andragogy currently practiced and use of peer leadership are no guarantee for future success. The Army expects commissioned officers from the ROTC programs to demonstrate the principles from the ALRM. This study was important to assess the lived experiences of cadets in the ROTC program to understand their leadership development experience to examine if they are reflecting durable attributes and competencies leaders are expected to display.

Purpose of the Study

Despite the growing scholarship on generational differences (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004), leadership development andragogy (Knowles et al., 1988), and peer leadership (Skipper & Keup, 2017), little research has connected these three areas. Unfortunately, leadership training that comprises individual competence and relational competence is scarce in literature, as current leadership programs predominantly follow

the traditional approach to leadership, which are a competency-based or behavior-based training curriculum (Day et al., 2021; Liu, 2019). This study sought to understand how Generation Z Army ROTC cadets describe their leadership development experience. The Army has codified leadership capabilities using the ALRM. The ALRM describes what an Army leader is (i.e., the attributes) and what an Army leader does (i.e., the competencies; ADRP, 2012). This study sought to understand the development of durable leadership competencies and attributes to shape leader identity as described by Army ROTC Generation Z cadets at a 4-year ROTC program, which uses student-centered experiential learning as their andragogy. My research sought to directly address the gap in the literature with Generation Z leadership development through an in-depth, qualitative examination of Army ROTC cadet leadership experiences and leader identity through achieving durable leadership attributes and competencies, which shaped their leader identity. This may address the follow-up question of whether the ALRM is effective for today's Army ROTC cadets.

Peer leadership serves as a dominant force in the leadership development of college students (Brown, 1972); however, there is limited research on its impact with Generation Z Army ROTC cadets. My research explored how Army ROTC cadets perceived peer leadership impacting their leadership development. The results of this study may provide an application for other campus-based leadership development programs to gain durable results. This study filled multiple gaps in the literature. First, limited research exists, which specifically addresses leadership development in ROTC programs with respect to Generation Z students, particularly because the oldest representatives from this generation are 23 years old and most likely graduated college in

the past 2 years. Secondly, very little literature exists on developing durable leadership attributes and competencies in a student-centered experiential learning environment in conjunction with Generation Z ROTC students. According to Hightower et al. (2011), research has demonstrated that student-centered learning approaches are efficacious in improving student learning. Lastly, a significant gap in the literature exists analyzing peer leadership development of ROTC military cadet training regardless of the student generation.

Research Questions

The purpose of my research was to answer the question of how Generation Z Army ROTC cadets describe and interpret their leadership development experience.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do Army ROTC cadets describe their leadership development experience?

The purpose of this question was to provide an active voice to the participant to share their lived experience during their participation as an ROTC cadet.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does the Army leadership development experimental learning model produce durable leadership attributes and competencies to shape leader identity in Generation Z Army ROTC cadets?

The purpose of this research question was to gain perspective on their thoughts as they relate to leadership attributes and competencies. The question focused on self-reflection and student views on their individual identities as they practice leadership on campus and at CST.

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do Army ROTC cadets perceive peer leadership impacting their leadership development?

The purpose of this research question was to gain the ROTC cadets' perspective on their thoughts as they reflect on their personal experiences serving as a peer leader and how it influenced their leadership development and how their peer leadership impacted other ROTC cadets.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by social constructivist theory, social learning theory, and by Kolb's experiential learning theory. Constructivism has its earliest roots from Jean Piaget and John Dewey (Armstrong, 2019). Piaget (1952) stated that constructivism recognizes that learners build knowledge and understanding of the world when they learn and engage together in groups. In other words, students actively construct their own knowledge from their experience as a learner. This knowledge reconstruction is also referred to as cognitive constructivism. Philosopher John Dewey discussed the importance of the learner having an active role in his or her level of understanding through the process of inquiry and discovery. Rather than relying on memorization methods of teaching, Dewey believed students should be involved in activities that promote learning and the construction of knowledge (Dewey, 1938). Individuals use previous experiences to build or learn future experiences (Harasim, 2017). Vygotsky drew upon the learning theory of Piaget and Dewey, which included social aspects in their learning theories (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Thamraksa, 2003). Vygotsky's learning theory of constructivism focused on learning as a social process, where students explore knowledge and concepts in their interests, and derive meaning of the concepts through social interactions (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Thamraksa, 2003). This is referred to as social constructivism. Constructivism is closely tied to both student-centered active learning

and peer leadership. Harasim (2017) noted through the active and collaborative pedagogy of constructivism, students learn through working with peers to synthesize new ideas.

In social learning theory, which was advanced by Bandura (1977), human motivation and action are assumed to be based upon three types of expectancies: situation–outcome, action–outcome, and most importantly perceived self-efficacy. Prior to Bandura's theory in 1977, researchers had focused on learning through the consequences of one's behavior (Connor & Norman, 2005). Social learning theory made prominent the role of social modeling in human motivation, thought, and action (Bandura, 1977). Bandura demonstrated that learning by trial and error can be abbreviated through social modeling of knowledge and competencies, and in turn, generate new behavior patterns in a similar way by going beyond what they have seen or heard (Connor & Norman, 2005). Bandura (1977) stated people are actors and products of their environment. Behavioral control is made possible by a personal sense of control. Self-efficacy pertains to personal action or a 'can do' sense of control over one's environment reflecting a belief to master demands by means of adaptive action (Connor & Norman, 2005). Maddux (1995) indicated this increased sense of competence facilitates cognitive processes in numerous areas including decision making, goal setting, and academic achievement.

Kolb's experiential learning theory formalized the steps needed for learning to happen in a hands-on experience. He posited learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's experiential learning model identified two ways of acquiring knowledge and skills through experience and two ways of transforming through an experience. Kolb (1984) explained learning

was conceived as a process as opposed to behavioral outcomes, which is what distinguishes it from the idealist approach of traditional education. With experiential learning theory, ideas are not fixed but rather formed and reformed through experience. The learning is continuously modified through experience (Kolb, 1984). Student-centered experiential learning is rooted in constructivist learning theory and experiential learning theory. Concurrently, the Army ROTC program is rooted in the andragogy of student-centered experiential learning.

Definitions

ALRM. ALRM is defined as an Army doctrine that provides a fundamental set of attributes and competencies common to the direct, organizational, and strategic levels of leadership. Furthermore, it establishes what leaders need to be, know, and do (APD, 2019).

Andragogy. Andragogy is defined as the practice of adult education and learning (Knowles et al., 1998).

Blue Cards. Blue Cards are an evaluation tool used in Army ROTC to record various aspects of a cadet's performance and development to include leadership abilities, physical fitness, and military skills. Primarily used during leadership labs, field training exercise (FTX), and CST (Army Cadet Command Headquarters, 2018).

Cadet Summer Training. Cadet summer training (CST) is defined as a 35-day annual capstone training event held at Ft. Knox, Kentucky for Army ROTC cadets to demonstrate leadership skills as a requirement to commission as a second lieutenant (Army Cadet Command Headquarters, 2018).

Experiential Learning. Experiential learning is defined as an educational approach that emphasizes learning through direct, hands-on experiences and reflections on those experiences (Kolb, 1984).

Generation Z. Generation Z is defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2017).

Leadership. For the purpose of this study, leadership is defined as the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization (APD, 2019).

Millennial Generation. Individuals born between 1981 and 1996 are considered members of the millennial generation (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004).

Peer Leadership. Peer leadership is defined as a leadership style where influence and guidance come from within the peer group rather than an authority figure or formal leader (Skipper & Keup, 2017).

Student-Centered Learning. Student-centered learning is defined as an educational approach that places the learner at the center of the learning process (Rogers, 1983).

Chapter Review

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study and why it needs to be done. The background provided a summary of the research literature, which provided a generational review with focus on Generation Z students, who are the current population in higher education. The study then provided an overview of student-centered learning and peer leadership. It included a macro level review of the Army ROTC leadership development program. The study noted any gaps in the literature. The introduction included the

research problem statement, purpose of the study and the research questions. Lastly it addressed the theoretical framework of both constructivist theory and Kolb's experiential learning theory and defined key terms.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion on the theoretical framework, focusing on social constructivist theory, social learning theory, and experiential learning theory and how they benefit the current study. It provides a literature review of current peer reviewed literature on understanding Generation Z, student involvement and student development, student-centered learning and peer leadership. Finally, it identifies how the study fills the gaps in the current literature as it relates to effective andragogy for Generation Z students.

Chapter 3 provides the methodology for the study. This study used interpretive phenomenological analysis, which is a qualitative approach used to provide detailed examinations of lived personal experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This chapter describes the research design, population sampling from an ROTC program in northern New Jersey, instrumentation, and data collection, which will include semistructured interviews, observation and document reviews and analysis, the role of the researcher, and ethical assurances. Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the research and conclusions drawn from the research.

Conclusion

Students of the Generation Z learn and interact differently from those of previous generations. Institutions of higher education are now challenged to implement new and effective strategies to address the challenges posed by the learning styles of the Generation Z students. Student-centered learning, which was advanced by Rogers in

1961, is used to create an environment that involves changes in the responsibilities of the learners and the instructors, which is a shift from the traditional teacher centered classroom. The learner gains through individualization, interaction through team learning, and integrating what they learned to create new meaning (Corley, 2012). This study analyzed the lived experience of ROTC cadets to discover the development of durable leadership attributes and competencies for Generation Z students participating in an ROTC program in northern New Jersey. This study proposed the concept that the group learning environment through student-centered experiential learning and peer leadership enhance durable leadership development attributes and competencies.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The transition from high school to college presents real challenges for incoming freshmen all the way to graduation, if the students make it that far. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021), 25% of freshmen do not return after their first year and nearly 40% will fail to graduate in 6 years. These challenges include being away from home, rigorous coursework, and new social challenges to name a few. Therefore, keeping students in the classroom is difficult enough let alone training them to be future leaders.

To provide context to this phenomenological study to understand leadership development of Generation Z ROTC students, who implement student-centered experiential learning and peer leadership, reviewing some critical sequential indices, which affect the ultimate goal of commissioning new officers into the Army, is necessary. Institutions of higher education must understand the conditions that place students in an ideal learning environment to build durable leadership traits to develop future leaders. In response to the changing student populations at universities, academic staff developers need to be aware of the student generational mix at their university (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004). The key is first recognizing the generation of students now entering higher education and how they learn differently from the previous generation. Secondly, they need to focus on how student involvement, and in turn, student development impacts leadership development providing for the development of leadership attributes and competencies. The third key is matching a learning style that is adaptable to the learning structure of the new generational student entering higher

education today. Lastly, invoking a feedback mechanism to reinforce developed leadership attributes and competencies through peer leadership is needed.

This literature review begins by exploring the research on social constructivist theory, social learning theory, and experiential learning theory. It then reviews in detail the four essential steps mentioned previously: Step 1 consists of a review of the generational shift from Millennials to Generation Z; Step 2 reviews the developmental cycle from student learning to student involvement to leadership development, which provides an overview of multiple campus based leadership programs including a rich review of the leadership attributes and competencies from the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ALRM); Step 3 reviews student-centered versus teacher-centered learning; and Step 4 discusses peer leadership.

Theoretical Framework Learning Theories

Constructivism was originally inspired during the 20th century by the seminal works of Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky. Constructivism is based on the premise that human beings learn in the process of gaining and creating new ideas and concepts from past experiences (Armstrong, 2019). According to Harasim (2017), constructivism holds that learning takes place when people experience and construct their own knowledge and understanding while reflecting upon those experiences. Constructivism is an active learning process of knowledge construction where learners actively participate in construction their knowledge in their own way (Harasim, 2017). Some authors have stated constructivism could have its foundational roots as early as 399 B.C. during Socrates's time, who argued that learners and instructors interact with each other to construct hidden knowledge through discussions and brainstorming (Bada & Olusegun,

2015). Instructors knowledgeable in constructivist theory understand that students bring their own experiences to the classroom and are impacted by their previous knowledge and background. In addition to learning being constructed as an active process, learning is also a social activity. Individuals are connected to others. The connection to family, friends, peers, and others impacts learning. Peer involvement is key. The social interaction through conversations, interaction, and group work aids students with knowledge retention (Kalina & Powell, 2009).

Conceptually, constructivism can be divided into two theories: Piaget (cognitive) and Vygotsky (social). Piaget (1952) believed that learning is a continuous active process where a student learns, makes an experience off it, and make mistakes and look for solutions to the mistakes made. Piaget (1952) argued cognitive constructivism evolved around schema and equilibration (i.e., adaptation and assimilation). Schema is the building block of knowledge defined as a cohesive, repeatable action sequence that is organized with the intention of creating understanding and intelligence. Fosnot (2005) explained equilibration as the process of "self-regulated behaviors balancing two intrinsic polar behaviors, adaptation and assimilation" (p. 38). Adaptation occurs when the learner experience is out of equilibrium when incoming information requires them to either develop a new schema or accommodate the current schema (Ormrod, 2008). Assimilation is a cognitive process of adding new information to an existing schema (Ormrod, 2008). Cognitive constructivism is based on two principles: active learning and authentic "real" learning (Piaget, 1952). Active learning allows people to learn by actively constructing new knowledge as opposed to being provided the information. Authentic learning on the

other hand is learning designed to connect learners from real-life experience (Harasim, 2017).

Vygotsky is well known for his theory on social constructivism. Building upon the idea of learning through experience, Vygotsky's emphasis was on the social aspect of building understanding. Vygotsky (1978) stated learners acquire knowledge through social interactions. Vygotsky explained that when children are growing up, they build new concepts by interacting and engaging with one another while they are simultaneously receiving feedback on the tasks they are seeking to accomplish (Harasim, 2017; Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky (1978) conceptualized a zone of proximal development (ZPD) in which the true capability of a learner was represented by "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under-guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). The zone of proximal development is fundamental in the development of cognition in human beings where knowledge clearly originates from the human social construct (Armstrong, 2019). Learners can create and synthesize new ideas through social engagement via peer discussion, group projects and collaborative learning. Leader development in the Army ROTC program is highly based on the modeling and mentoring among peers and the guidance they receive from other leaders. The ROTC leadership development program affords these social interactions without prescribed outcomes to facilitate leader development.

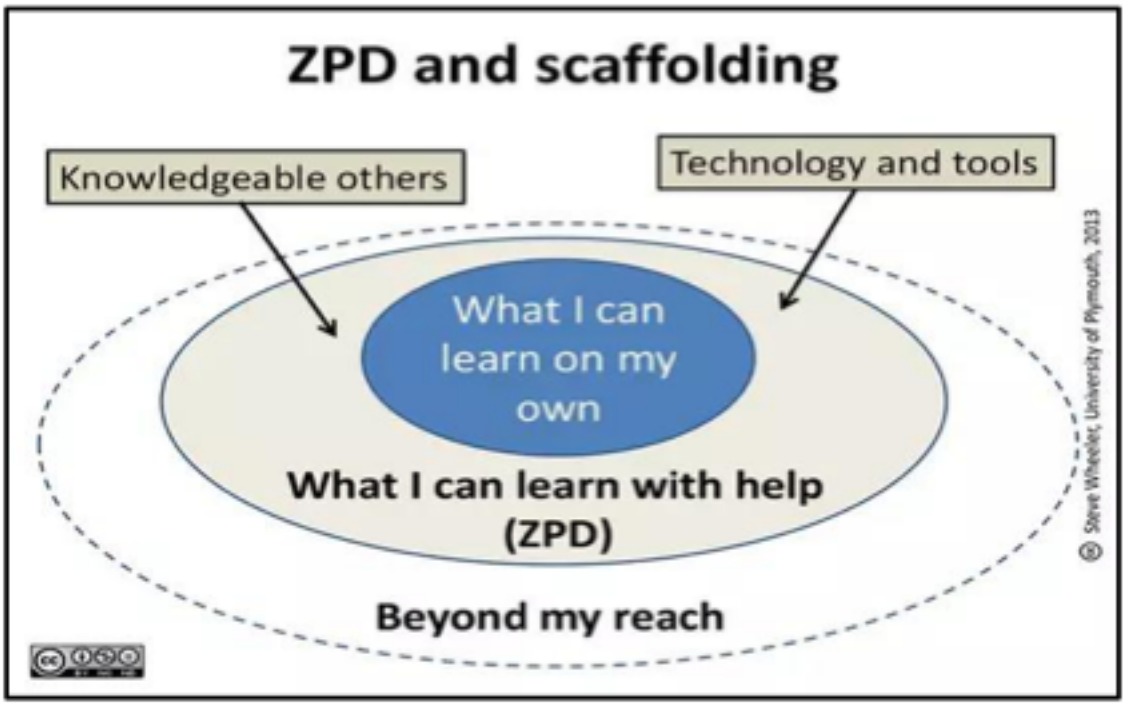
Vygotsky (1978) believed learning occurs in the zone of proximal development, and he explained the importance of understanding what a learner currently knows and what the learner has the potential to understand with scaffolding. Vygotsky (1978)

emphasized that authentic learning and development always occurs in a social context where learners collaborate with other learners who are more skillful. Additionally, as the more knowledgeable learners provide direction to others to develop knowledge and skills in the zone of proximal development, the more knowledgeable learner increases their skills and abilities. In the military, leaders are trained to be adaptive, flexible, and agile and are interdependent upon one another for the success of the team. The social interactions among the leader and the follower provides for the growth and development of the team and the ability to execute the mission. Miller (2011) stated leadership is a higher function of societal interaction and is based on activities such as communication and formal or informal instruction. Vygotsky (1978) stated learners have the capacity to externalize with social group members of a shared experience, which is crucial to understanding leader development.

The diagram in Figure 1 highlights the three sections in the zone of proximal development. The concept of a zone of proximal development shows how learners could compensate for the gap between their actual developmental level and their potential through the guidance of capable peers (Wheeler, 2013). Shibani and Khatib (2010) stated the focus of teaching is on tasks inside the zone of proximal development, which learners cannot do by themself but has the potential to accomplish with the guidance of others. Cole and Cole (2001) asserted the term proximal indicates the assistance provided goes just slightly beyond the learner's current competence complementing and building on their existing abilities.

Figure *1*

Zone of Proximal Development



Note. From *Collaborative Learning and Online Communities,* by L. Wheeler, 2013, p. 27 (https://opennetworkedlearning.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/onl151-steve-wheeler.pdf).

In the Army ROTC program, the Military Science Level 4 cadets serve in the role of knowledgeable others and provide the guidance to the Military Science Level 3 cadets as they prepare to attend the cadet summer training (CST) at the end of their junior year of college. A key component in this current diagram, in addition to knowledgeable others, is technology. This was not as significant a component when Vygotsky proposed the zone of proximal development in 1962, but for Generation Z students is formative and part of their generational DNA. Today's generation of cadets are aided by technology to reduce the gap in the zone of proximal development and can rely on online video, virtual training

aids, and other social media in addition to peer support to progress faster. Koehler and Mishra (2009) supported this point explaining that technology is a significant component of 21st century teaching and learning. Technology illuminates the content (i.e., knowledge and skill) and pedagogical tools for teaching and learning. Multiple studies (Armstrong, 2019; Huang et al., 2012) that support the theory of social constructivism found participants conducting group learning and completing collaborative assignments achieved better learning outcomes compared to their counterparts in the control group. Armstrong (2019) additionally noted the instructor eventually shifts in the direction of the learner's contribution.

The key constructs of social learning theory are observation and self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) conducted studies to evaluate how new behaviors are acquired through observation and noted others cannot stop individuals from learning what they have witnessed. Bandura (1977) studied how observation and modeling have a profound influence on learning. Additionally, through observation, individuals can attain cultural cues such as values and beliefs (Bandura, 1977). Social modeling can accelerate the generation of new behavioral patterns and can affect motivation by instilling behavioral outcome expectations (Bandura, 1977).

Additionally, Bandura (1977) believed behavioral change is made possible by a personal sense of control. Perceived self-efficacy pertains to personal action control or agency. Miller (2011) stated that individuals have choice. When individuals believe they can take action to resolve an issue, they become more inclined to do so and committed to the decision. Self-efficacy makes a positive difference in the way people think and feel and a "can do" cognition that mirrors a sense of control over one's environment

(Bandura, 1977, p. 200. According to social learning theory, human motivation and action are extensively regulated by forethought. The two constructs are perceived self-efficacy and outcome expectancy. Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people's beliefs in their capabilities to perform a specific action. Outcome expectancies are concerned with people's beliefs about the possible consequences of their actions.

In the Army ROTC program cadets at all levels of the program from the most junior cadets in Military Science Level 1 to the most senior level cadets in the Military Science Level 4 curriculum are reflective of the social learning theory. Cadets just starting the program in college have limited observational leadership experiences upon which to draw other than coaches from their sports teams, school faculty and staff, personal jobs, or possibly religious affiliations. Upon arriving to college to participate in Army ROTC, they begin to have the opportunity not only to observe more experienced ROTC cadets but also the seasoned ROTC instructors. The ROTC leadership development program even provides opportunities for these new cadets to be placed in lower responsibility leadership roles as a team leader in charge of one to three cadets. In addition to learning through observation, the cadet's self-efficacy begins to increase as these cadets begin to accomplish tasks in support of the programs mission for the week, which relates to Bandura's outcome expectancy. Further, cadets, though observation, begin to develop a sense of choice on which leadership characteristics they want to adapt and which ones they choose not to adapt. They begin to make mental notes of what effective leadership models and ineffective leadership models look like.

Kolb (1984) formalized the fundamental theory of experiential learning, where learning happens in a hands-on experience. Kolb stated, "learning is the process whereby

knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). The emphasis on the process of learning as opposed to behavioral outcomes distinguishes experiential learning from other traditional education behavioral theories. In experiential learning theory, ideas are not fixed but are formed and re-formed through experience (Kolb, 1984). Stated another way, learning is a continuous process grounded in experience, which implies that all learning is relearning (Kolb, 1984).

According to Campbell (2017), the Army ROTC program used experiential learning. The program used interactive leadership opportunities during physical training sessions. Also, each week, leadership labs provided dynamic and varied leadership experiences to expand cadets' experience, confidence, and perception of their leader identity (Campbell, 2017). The Army adopted the experiential learning theory, made small modifications, and renamed it the experiential learning model. According to Pierson (2017), the model is based upon Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle in which learners create knowledge by grasping experience and then transforming it into actionable information. Kolb models the cognitive processes of learning through a four-stage cycle of learning that consists of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Pierson, 2017). Kolb explained the two ways of acquiring knowledge and skills through an experience (i.e., concrete experience and abstract conceptualization) and two ways of transforming through an experience (i.e., reflective observation and active experimentation).

During the first step, the concrete experience, the learner faces a new experience they may have never encountered before. In the ROTC this could equate to wearing a military uniform or marching in a military formation. According to Campbell (2017),

concrete events help the learner draw upon past knowledge and experience and serve as a mechanism to scaffold new learning. This new experience prepares the cadet to internalize new information. Pierson (2017) stated during the reflective observation, the learners consider similarities and differences between the new experience and their own experiences. The cadet evaluates the situation as experience versus understanding. In the example of a new cadet, they may not realize the importance and symbolism and pride inherent in wearing the military uniform or the precision required in marching. The third step, abstract conceptualization, occurs when students formulate solutions for improvement to apply to the next experience based on their reflection (Kolb, 1984). The learner forms his or her own thought or concept and is then able to gather conclusions based on their conceptual understanding. Finally, during active experimentation, the learners apply their conclusions to a different situation creating a new experience (Pierson, 2017). This step allows the cadet to participate in a practice exercise and apply their new knowledge. The gained knowledge allows the cadet to further encounter new experiences.

Pierson (2017) noted critics of Kolb's (1984) cycle point to experience as an interpreted stimulus and not an actual real-world occurrence that the learner must encounter. Other educational theorists view experience as a way of knowing about a phenomenon. This places a greater emphasis on understanding other experiences rather than reflecting on one's own experiences (Pierson, 2017).

Learning Theories Contribution to Cadet Learning

These three prominent learning theories—Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Kolb's experiential learning theory—offer valuable

insights and strategies for enhancing the learning experiences of ROTC cadets. Each theory contributes in its unique way to the development of future military officers, emphasizing the importance of social interaction, observation, self-efficacy, experiential learning, and adaptation (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory underscores the significance of collaborative learning and interaction among cadets. In the ROTC context, where teamwork and camaraderie are vital, this theory aligns perfectly. Collaborative learning activities, such as group problem-solving exercises or discussions that occur during the leadership labs and CST, encourage cadets to work together, drawing on each other's strengths and knowledge. This collaborative approach resonates with Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD, where individuals are guided and supported by more knowledgeable peers or instructors to tackle tasks just beyond their current abilities (Shibani & Khatib, 2010). Mentorship, another key aspect of ROTC, also mirrors Vygotsky's theory, as more experienced cadets or military personnel play the role of the "more knowledgeable other" in assisting the learning process (Wheeler, 2013, p. 27). Further, as ROTC programs often comprise cadets from diverse backgrounds, Vygotsky's emphasis on the cultural and social context of learning can be harnessed to promote cultural understanding and sensitivity among cadets, facilitating improved communication and teamwork in the group (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bandura's social learning theory is relevant in the context of ROTC training. Cadets frequently observe and learn from experienced military personnel or senior cadets, making role modeling an essential component of their learning experience. By watching and emulating role models, cadets can acquire not only technical skills but also leadership

behaviors and styles, aligning with Bandura's concept of observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy, another key aspect of Bandura's theory, plays a pivotal role in cadet development (Bandura, 1977). Building self-confidence and a belief in one's abilities is crucial for success in military training. Instructors and mentors can actively contribute to enhancing cadet self-efficacy by providing constructive feedback, recognizing achievements, and offering positive reinforcement (Miller, 2011). Additionally, behavior reinforcement techniques can be applied in ROTC programs to encourage desired behaviors and discourage undesirable ones (Bandura, 1977). Recognizing and rewarding exemplary conduct or addressing and correcting problematic behavior on the ROTC Blue Cards aligns with Bandura's principles and can help shape the behavior and values of the cadets as future military leaders.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory emphasizes the importance of hands-on training and the application of knowledge in real-world situations, both of which are highly relevant to ROTC programs (Kolb, 1984). Cadets benefit greatly from practical exercises, physical training sessions, field training, and simulations that allow them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. This aligns with Kolb's concept of active experimentation, which encourages learners to engage actively in experiences and learn from the outcomes. Additionally, reflective learning practices are integral to Kolb's theory. After training exercises or field missions, cadets can engage in reflective practices, analyzing their experiences, identifying lessons learned, and adapting their future actions, which is often conducted at the end of these exercises in the form of an after-action review (AAR; Pierson, 2017). This process aligns with Kolb's reflective observation stage and promotes continuous improvement and development. Furthermore,

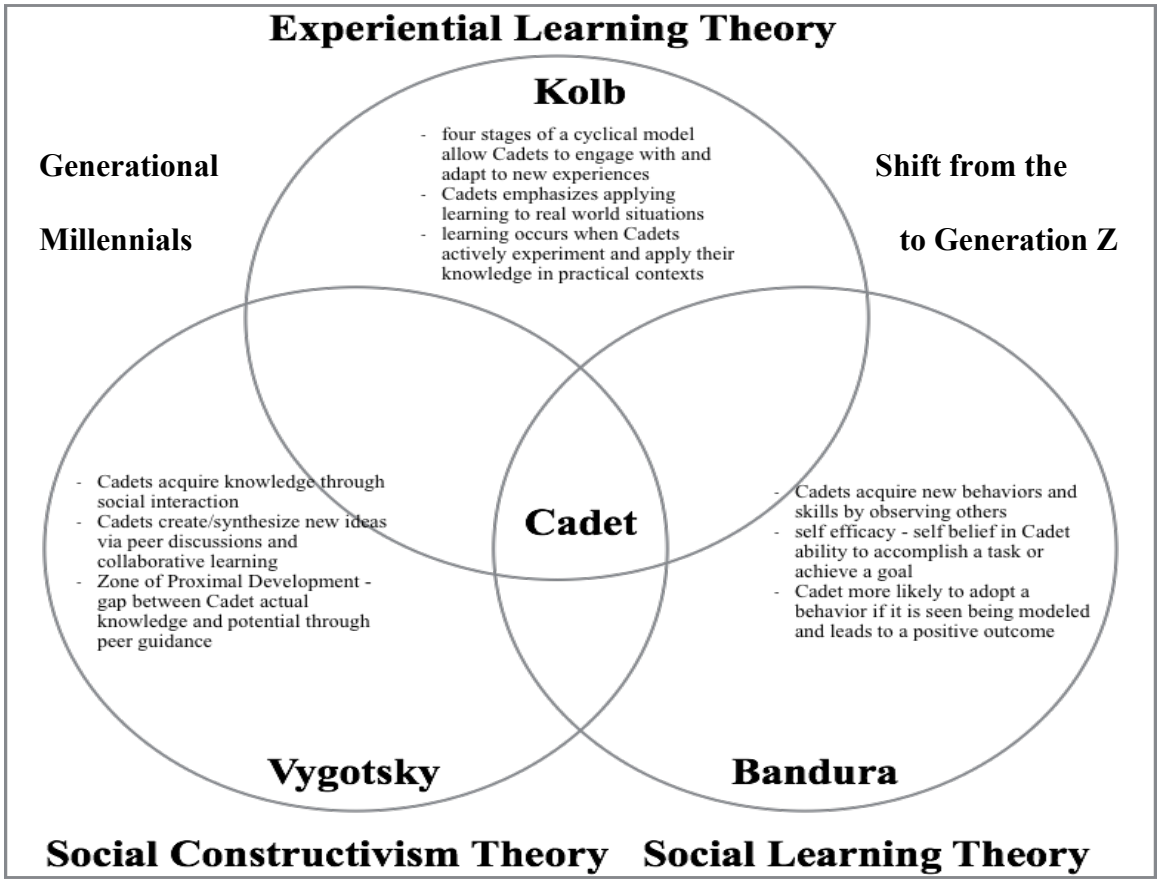
Kolb's experiential learning theory fosters the development of adaptive leadership skills, highly valued in military contexts (Kolb, 1984). ROTC cadets learn to adapt to changing situations, make informed decisions under pressure, and continually enhance their leadership abilities through practical experiences, effectively preparing them for their future roles as military officers.

The incorporation of these three learning theories into ROTC training programs offers a holistic approach to education and leadership development for the cadets. These theories provide a solid framework for designing instructional strategies that promote active engagement, social interaction, self-efficacy, and experiential learning (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). The implementation of these theories into the curriculum of the ROTC programs can better equip cadets with the skills, knowledge, abilities, and mindset required to excel as a commissioned officer.

The diagram in Figure 2 highlights the three learning theories from Vygotsky (1978), Bandura (1977), and Kolb (1984). The diagram depicts key elements from each theory and the mutually overlapping relationship that support the leadership development experience for the ROTC cadet as they learn and develop new skills and behaviors through interaction with more knowledgeable peers and others, observation, build their self-belief in their abilities, and learn through experiences (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978).

Figure 2

The Learning Theory Relationship and Cadet Learning



Institutions of higher education are more multigenerational than ever before, with faculty from the "Silent" generation through Millennials (Kleinhans et al., 2015; Rickes, 2016). The majority of undergraduate, traditional aged students have shifted from primarily Millennials to Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Shatto & Erwin, 2016). Faculty must be keen to adapting to the needs as learning styles evolve to keep the interest and focus of the youngest generation.

The millennial generation, also known as Generation Y, generally includes people born between 1981 and 1996. Jonas-Dwyer and Pospisil (2004) highlighted numerous

characteristics of millennial generation students including being tech-savvy, diverse, collaborative, entrepreneurial, and global minded. Millennials grew up with technology, and they are comfortable using it to learn and communicate. Raines (2002) explained this generation is more diverse than previous generations, with a mix of cultures, backgrounds, and identities. Millennials are collaborative; they value teamwork and group projects, and they are comfortable working with others. They are entrepreneurial, are interested in starting their own businesses, and pursuing their passions. They think on a larger scale and are interested in global issues and value international experiences (Raines, 2002). Additionally, Jonas-Dwyer and Pospisil (2004) noted millennials are socially conscious. They are passionate about social justice issues and are more likely to engage in social activism. They are achievement-oriented, value success, and are driven to achieve their goals. Raines (2002) also contended Millennials are flexible, independent, and constantly connected to technology. Millennials are adaptable and comfortable with change. This generation values autonomy and independence and are constantly connected with smartphones and social media, allowing them to stay in touch with friends and family.

Individuals in Generation Z were born between 1997 and 2010 (Gloeckler, 2008). According to Miller and Mills (2019), Generation Z is even more technologically integrated than the previous generation and have their lives intertwined with technology, staying globally connected through social media as the norm. They experienced a great deal of parental and primary and secondary teacher oversight, have an extremely short attention span, and expect instant answers and gratification. Miller and Mills (2019) further highlighted Generation Z want teachers who do more than lecture, and they want

opportunities to interact with their peers to learn in collaborative ways, whether in class or while studying. As digital natives, they prefer learning in interactive ways. They prefer receiving information in nonlinear fashion and using communication technologies for social networks and access to information (Kennedy & Fox, 2013). They can absorb and process vast amounts of information quickly and are constantly connected (McAlister, 2009). Seemiller and Grace (2017) found that 83% of Generation Z students prefer face-to-face communication because it allows them to connect better and read the other person.

Additionally, Generation Z students prefer to engage in hands-on learning opportunities to immediately apply what they learn to real life (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Coincidentally, as much as they prefer hands-on learning, Generation Z students are keen observers. They like to watch others complete tasks before attempting those tasks. This ability to learn through observation translates well to experimental learning found in Army ROTC, particularly in the leadership labs, physical training sessions, field training exercises, and other on campus activities in which the junior level cadets can watch and learn from senior level cadets. Skopec (2021) stated it would not be unusual to see Gen Z students watching a video on how to do something rather than reading about it in a book. Further Seemiller and Grace (2017) noted more than 70% of Generation Z students think it is important to be able to design and build their own course of study or major and prefer to learn on their own time and in their own way. This coincides with a student-centered experiential learning model.

Many additional characteristics of Generation Z include a strong desire to achieve, are self-starters, are bored with traditional teaching methods, expect instant gratification,

are comfortable working independently, prefer group work over lecture, and engage in self-evaluation of their learning (Worley, 2011). Garner (2015) referred to these characteristics and learning styles as "generational diversity" (p. 43). Interestingly, Seemiller and Grace (2017) noted Generation Z students seek internships early in their school experience because they want their coursework to reflect in their work experience. Additionally, many want to work for themselves after college, which again is reflective of what they are studying in college (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018). In both instances, this parallels with many of the cadets participating in the ROTC program, particularly the Military Science Level 3 (MS III) and Military Science Level 4 (MS IV) cadets, as they have signed a contract with the U.S. Army to commission as officers upon graduation. The ROTC coursework and experience favors this generational preference.

Leadership Development Cycle

Leadership development is often preceded by learning. Numerous studies exist on how individuals learn; however, over the past 2 decades, transformational learning theory has been the most prevalent. It is the process of constructing or revising the interpretation of one's experience as a guide to action (Brown & Posner, 2001). The critical components of transformational learning include experience, critical reflection and self-reflection, affective learning, dialogue and relationships, and individual development (Taylor, 2007). Exploring the life experience in a reflective manner is required for transformation (Brown & Posner, 2001). Mezirow (1994) stated learning is the process of appropriating a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's life experiences, which shape us in a new way that others can recognize. A less expansive topic is how people learn to lead. Kouzes and Posner (1987) noted learning occurs from trial and error,

observation of others, and education. Additionally, job assignments, people with whom individuals work, conditions and environment, and formal training support leader development.

Mezirow (2007) highlighted four processes associated with transformational learning. They included the first process, elaborating the current meaning structure, in which evidence is provided to support one's initial bias on their point of view. The second process is establishing new meaning structures or points of view. For example, a student may focus on the negative shortcoming of an outcome and create a new negative meaning for what they learned, or they may focus on a positive outcome and create a new positive meaning. The third process is the transformation of points of view, where individuals reflect on their assumptions or misconceptions and hopefully change their perspective to a new meaning. The fourth process is the transformation of meaning, which is the transformation of our habits when we critically reflect upon a prior understanding, transform the understanding, and incorporate a new thought process to understand the experience. Mezirow (2007) further explained the transformation can either result from a single experience or a cumulative life experience. Regardless, the transformational learning occurs when we step out of what we know to be true.

Learning to lead is an equally expansive topic, which most notably is encompassed by the word change. Leaders are both born and made. Many factors, in addition to genetics, shape or develop a leader including family, education, and job experiences. Leadership competencies such as self-confidence, achievement drive, and communication are developed through our family environment. These skills are then honed through firsthand experiences in school and college (Congor, 2004). The

significant pillars of transformational leadership that characterize effectiveness include creating and following a vision, impactful two-way communication, and developing and establishing trust in self and others. Effective leaders are always learning from their experience, which shapes their development (Brown & Posner, 2001). Leadership development is defined as a deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process that grows individuals into competent and confident leaders. Leadership development is achieved through the life-long synthesis of the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained through the training, education, and self-development domains (Army Doctrinal Publication [ADP], 2019). Therefore, leadership development is a direct result from experience and student involvement.

Generation Z students want to be active participants in the learning process. Student involvement then opens the door for leadership development opportunities. Astin (1984) advanced the theory of student involvement, which noted that as students invest more time to educational activities, they can expect to make more cognitive and affective gains throughout their college years. The bottom line is students learn when they are involved. Coplin (2004) and others have suggested that coursework should be heavily supplemented by cocurricular involvement, which could include outside activities such as community service, debate teams, science fairs, drama clubs, and student government. They provide learning opportunities that generate leadership development opportunities. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) similarly found that students do improve their leadership skills through involvement in such activities and have been found to enhance the self-efficacy, civic engagement, academic performance, and personal development of students. In a study by Case (2011), she noted participation in campus clubs and

organizations enabled students to become purposefully involved in their educational experience. She found students participating in organizations experienced gains in cognitive skills, self-confidence and interpersonal skills, developmental skills, higher order thinking, and problem-solving skills. Reeves (2008) provided research findings associating high school involvement with predicting collegiate involvement. Marklein (2008) highlighted participation in collegiate clubs and organizations is an effective means of increasing student success among first-generation college students. Edelman et al. (2004), in a study on student development and leadership development at a private women's Catholic college, explored the relationship between cocurricular educational experiences and the development of students' leadership capabilities during their college career. They identified involvement in academic/departmental/professional organizations and/or honor societies seemed to have the greatest impact on students' leadership development, as they tend to focus on the integration of curricular and cocurricular knowledge, which may help to advance students' critical thinking skills and further their leadership development. I posit the Army ROTC programs, similarly to other campus-based organizations, engage students with opportunities for critical thinking, problem solving and other leadership development skills.

Leadership development has been approached from many angles to leave an indelible mark on those participants willing to assume the role as leader. Estevez (2019) explained this development is achieved through socialization. He explained this is a process where people learn to behave in a particular context through which shared beliefs, scripts, and values are developed. Fine (1984) acknowledged that as roles are learned and identities are developed through socialization, individuals learn how they are

supposed to act and in relation to whom. The United States Army has defined leadership development as a deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process that grows individuals into competent and confident leaders. This is achieved through the life-long synthesis of the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained through the training, education, and self-development domains (ADP, 2019). These experiences, through active participation and involvement, continue to build the young leader's developmental toolbox. Gannouni and Ramboarison-Lalao (2018) noted students who actively engage in leadership demonstrated increased drive, motivation, and are achievement driven.

Leadership development in the classroom has seen a more transformational shift over the past fifteen years adapting to meet the learning style of today's students. When the professor regularly leads the discussion as in teacher-centered learning, the learning comes from listening and memorization. This type of learning is effective to be able to recall information for an examination; however, it is weak when asked to demonstrate practical application. This form of institutional training has been the bedrock of education since medieval times with the scholar imparting wisdom to the student. Davidson and Goldberg (2009) indicated the emerging trend has moved to more participatory learning. This type of learning is inclusive of how learners use technology to participate with others to share ideas, plan, design, and implement what they are learning to achieve their goals together. Leadership development and practical leadership application is instilled through this collective process of two-way interaction found most expressively through peer engagement. This type of learning is viewed as nonlinear and occurs relationally favoring a more democratic approach to instruction where the teacher is on the periphery (Cornelius-White, 2007). Moate and Cox (2015) noted that in a study of professional

counselors' development, they found that experiential learning was the most helpful in their professional development. The lived experience creates the bond between the students working collaboratively in a student-centered environment and the knowledge gained, which creates the leadership development found in the enduring leadership attributes. These lived experiences, leadership outcomes, and behaviors can be explored in numerous types of campus-based leadership development programs.

Campus-Based Leadership Development Programs

Leadership development occurs both inside the classroom and through involvement outside of the classroom. There is an art and science for college educators to provide a powerful learning environment to build leadership capacity for students to emerge as leaders. Rosch and Anthony (2012) explained that educators must be intentional in matching their program or intended course outcomes with relevant leadership development theory and apply effective strategies for delivery of material to a diverse student population to build student leadership capacity. Day (2001) explained educators must distinguish between leadership and leader development. Leadership development is focused on the practice of building capacity to practice leadership in an organizational context where individuals can practice effective leadership. Leader development encompasses the development of skills in an individual. Baxter-Magolda and King (2004) explained effective leadership programs are measured, not by the relationship students have with their instructor, but by students' ability to apply their learning to the challenges they will face after program completion. In the case of ROTC cadets, those challenges include leading men and women immediately upon graduation

from college either stateside or the most dangerous scenario of leading them in a combat environment.

On campus leadership development takes many forms and opportunities for leadership or leader development. The most basic form of leadership development is in the form of curricular leadership where leadership training is completed in the classroom. Rosch and Anthony (2012) noted this is where students first recognize leadership as a discipline and helps them experience leadership in a new way. Course requirements and outcomes will include readings, assignments, and discussions. The most effective leadership courses should incorporate practical experience, providing ample opportunity to practice the lessons learned in the text or in life.

Extracurricular and cocurricular activities provide deeper opportunities for leader development. Students develop leadership skills through interaction with faculty and staff and participation in other clubs and organizations using campus resources and peer interaction. Examples of these extracurricular and cocurricular activities include outdoor recreation programs, intercollegiate athletics, student life, student mentoring programs, and ROTC.

Sibthorp et al. (2008) found outdoor recreation programs present opportunities to expand students' leadership identities by providing an outdoor-focused context. Outdoor education provides students with opportunities to develop leadership and practical skills in the areas of communication, group behavior, judgment, technical skills, and environmental awareness (Sibthorp et al., 2008). Sutherland and Stroot (2010) noted outdoor recreation programs provide leaders the ability to learn to be flexible, adaptable, and capable of creating risk-managed and developmentally appropriate environments for

participants. The program develops the ability to change leadership styles to meet the changing situations in the outdoor environment. Sandberg et al., (2017) conducted a study to understand the shared positive elements exemplary outdoor programs are using to develop their student leaders. The purpose of the study was to explore the influences that allow for student leaders of cocurricular outdoor programs to develop their leadership identities. The study found five key influences that became evident as they analyzed the data: (a) institutional support, (b) transformative experiences, (c) meaningful program culture, (d) facilitative structures, and (e) the keys to the castle: authentic leadership opportunities. Boettcher and Gansemer-Topf (2015) explored the effect of an outdoor recreation program's 5-day trip-leader training on student leadership identity. These studies give initial support to the idea of outdoor program leader training as a successful leadership development incubator, but do not explore the effect of student leadership development beyond this 6-month time period. Fields (2010) showed leadership growth over the first 6 months of the leadership process, starting with classroom sessions and finishing after students successfully led a 5-day preorientation wilderness trip.

Intercollegiate athletics offer another venue to implement and practice leadership development. Weaver and Simet (2015) explained the intercollegiate athletics' team structure presents an existing framework that lends itself nicely with the application of thorough leadership development programs. Student-athlete leadership is a key component coaches seek when recruiting athletes to schools. Often, athletes earn their ways into leadership roles through team seniority as they move from freshmen to senior. Other times the oldest athletes are assigned the title of team captain and are placed into

the role via seniority. Weaver and Simet (2015) further explained athletic departments should foster leadership development and continuously work with promising student athletes. Creating and promoting opportunities that can help advance a student athlete's leadership development is essential for success.

On-campus student life and student mentoring programs provide opportunities for leader development on campus. Peer mentoring can be beneficial to the mentor and those being mentored. Peer mentoring can have a more positive impact as mentors are often viewed as collaborators, teammates, and leaders. Peer leaders are more likely to be perceived as less threatening than older professional authority figures. Further, Cuseo (2010) found when inexperienced college students are paired with peer leaders, they have repeatedly been found to increase their academic performance and personal development. Additionally, research indicates that students prefer to have someone 1–3 years older rather than someone the same age, faculty, or administrators (Cuseo, 2010). Peer leadership has been found to have a positive impact on student retention to graduation and increases in academic achievement. Black and Voelker (2008) identified students who are linked with peer mentors are more likely to remain in college at higher rates than those who do not receive the same support, as they tend to see themselves as integral parts of the campus community, and they will remain in the community until they complete their degree. Peer leadership can have a powerful impact on academic achievement and can serve as a duel edged sword for both the peer teacher and the peer student to make academic achievements (Black & Voelker, 2008). Military doctrine indicates that leaders must develop a culture where leaders have the passion and mindset to develop others daily.

ROTC is a college elective offered at 273 colleges and universities throughout the United States and territories providing leadership and military training while serving as the primary commissioning source for new officers. The ROTC program delivers leader development across four major learning areas: Army leadership and the profession, mission command, human dimension, and professional competence (Mele, 2020).

The program is divided into two courses and blends the material from each learning area over the course of 8 military science academic semesters. The basic course, which comprises the first 2 years of ROTC with an introduction to leadership and applied leadership theory, is taught with a more traditional instructor-led approach initially then blends toward student-centered learning. The course curriculum during the first 2 years is considered the Military Science Level 1 (MS I) and Military Science Level 2 (MS II).

MS I focuses on the reception and integration of new cadets into the ROTC battalion. All MS I cadets are placed into teams in a squad. This team consists of four to five other cadets (Seton Hall University, 2015). Coursework includes introduction into the Army, foundations of adaptive leadership, time management, Warrior Ethos, military problem solving, and the ALRM (Mele, 2020). Instruction is provided by upperclassmen and active-duty cadre with both lecture and leadership training exercises.

MS II focuses on initial leadership development through small team leadership. MS II cadets assume the leadership role of team leader. MS II team leaders lead four to five MS I cadets in both a garrison and tactical environment (Seton Hall University, 2015). Coursework includes fundamentals of the Army profession (i.e., Army Values, The Warrior Ethos, The Army Ethic), the foundational Army leadership doctrine, the Army's eight troop-leading procedures, the value of diversity, and an officer's role in

leading change. (Mele, 2020). Instruction is provided by upperclassmen and active-duty cadre with both lecture and leadership training exercises. As students transition into the advanced course during the 3rd and 4th years of ROTC, the program is more learner led with instructors more in a mentorship role (Army Cadet Command Headquarters, 2018). The course curriculum during the last 2 years is considered MS III and MS IV.

MS III focuses on expanded leadership development through platoon and company level leadership. MS III cadets assume the leadership role of squad leader, platoon sergeant, and first sergeant. MS III cadets lead nine to 25 underclassmen in both a garrison and tactical environment (Seton Hall University, 2015). Coursework focuses on applied leadership in small unit operations, giving and receiving peer evaluations, the fundamentals of organizational training management, and how the Army operates through the warfighting functions (Mele, 2020). MS III cadets' leadership abilities are continually tested during this course.

MS IV focuses on officer leadership development through company and battalion level leadership. MS IV cadets assume the leadership role of platoon leader, executive officer, company commander, battalion staff, battalion executive officer, command sergeant major, or battalion commander (Seton Hall University, 2015). Coursework includes company-grade leadership, which includes learning how to plan, resource and assess small unit training, counseling and evaluating subordinates, and the roles and responsibilities of officers in Army organizations (Mele, 2020). MS IV cadets plan leadership labs, training exercises, formal events, and weekly staff meetings.

The ROTC leadership development program is an individual-focused training process designed to develop leadership skills in a variety of training environments, which

include on-campus, in the community, and at military training facilities. The flexible methodology of the leadership development program facilitates individualized development through all phases of the cadets' ROTC experience through the final goal of commissioning as an officer (U.S. Army Cadet Command, 2009). All ROTC programs use experiential learning as the theoretical framework of the course and is most noticeably observed during the leadership labs, physical training sessions, cadet assessment and feedback opportunities, and other on campus experiences. Peer leadership and socialization are a critical component of the cadet assessment and feedback opportunities, just referenced, as cadets begin to construct knowledge based on their experience as either the cadet being assessed or the one providing the assessment. The ROTC programs are tailored based on the direction of the professor of military science guidelines. Although the program follows a more student-centered approach, the professor of military science (PMS) has the latitude to apply a blended learning approach to include a teacher-led model as needed. The size of the ROTC program and the program's association as a host or affiliation school may dictate the direction from the professor of military science.

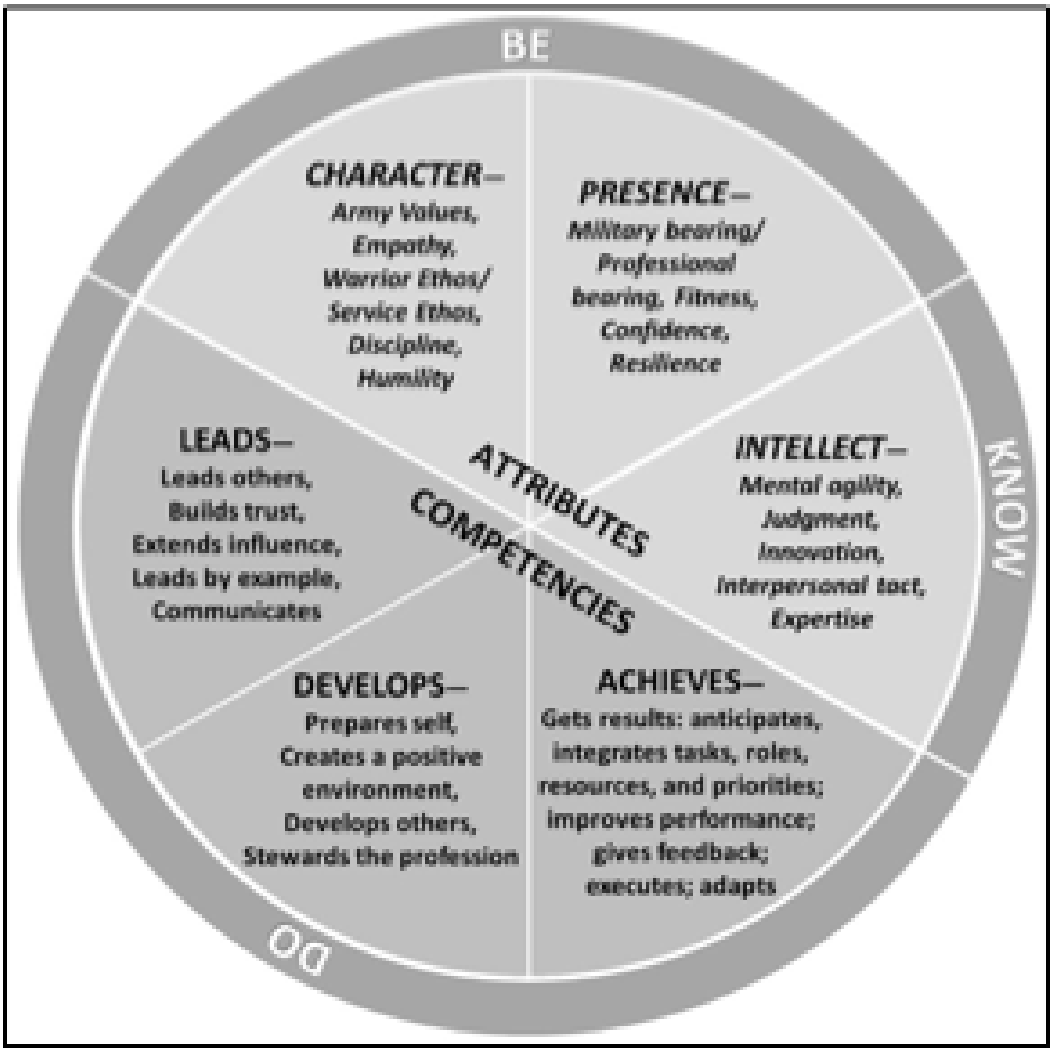
Army Leadership Requirements Model

Successful completion of CST is determined based on observation and demonstrated performance and evaluation of the leadership competencies and attributes. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, dated 31 July 2019, noted the Army leadership requirements model (see Figure 3) identifies core attributes and competencies applicable to all types and echelons of Army organizations and is considered a significant contributor to individual and unit readiness and effectiveness. It indicates the Army's

framework for leader development is based on the Be-Know-Do principles: what a leader is (i.e. be & know) and what a leader does (i.e. do principle; ADP, 2019). The application of the attributes and competencies prepares the Army leaders for situations they are most likely to encounter. For developmental purposes, the Army ROTC applies three levels of proficiency: a developmental need, the standard, and a strength, to evaluate and assess cadet leadership progress. A developmental need is identified when a cadet does not demonstrate a specific leader attribute or competency. At the other extreme, a strength performance indicator would be identified when a cadet consistently and successfully demonstrates a leader attribute or competency. A brief review of the specific leader attributes and sub-attributes and the leader competencies and sub-competencies are critical to support the findings and analysis for this study.

Figure 3

The Army Leadership Requirements Model



Note. From *ADP 6-22: Army Leadership.* Department of the Army, p. 15.

Leader Attributes

The leader attributes are characteristics internal to the leader, which affects how an individual behaves, thinks, and learns in their environment (Seton Hall University, 2015). The three categories of attributes in the ALRM are character, presence, and

intellect. The three leader attributes are divided into 13 sub-attributes displayed in Figure 3 depicting the ALRM under the Be and Know subheadings.

Character. ADP 6-22 (2019) defined character as the moral and ethical qualities of the leader. Character is the mindset and moral foundation behind actions and decisions. The four subattributes under character are Army Values, the Warrior Ethos/Service Ethos, display empathy, and practice good discipline. The Army recognizes that everyone who joins the military arrives with their own set of values, and they are free to choose them; however, when one takes the oath to join the military, they agree to subscribe and follow the Army Values. The seven core Army Values are a prescribed set of values, which are a set of expectations to make the right decision in any situation. The seven core Army Values form the acronym LDRSHIP. They are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The Army Values are evaluated as either a meets standard or needs improvement. This is a binary score because you either demonstrate the Army Value or you do not—no grey area exists for values. In the Army, those receiving a needs improvement on their cadet evaluation or a commissioned or non-commissioned officer evaluation, will receive separate developmental counseling to improve. No room for shortcomings exists when they relate to Army Values.

The Warrior Ethos represents the professional attitudes and beliefs that characterize the American Soldier (ADP, 2019). Leaders develop the Warrior Ethos through discipline, commitment to the Army Values, and pride in the Army's heritage. The Warrior Ethos creates loyalty and pride in the organization and support for the nation. Both the Army Values and the Warrior Ethos is socialized with every cadet

during the beginning of the MS I year and are foundational blocks in the leadership development process. These espoused values among the cadets become subconscious and at the heart of the group's beliefs (Schein, 1992). This leads to esprit de corps throughout any Army organization. This is articulated in the Warrior Ethos:

> I am an American Soldier.
>
> I am a warrior and a member of a team.
>
> I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.
>
> I will always place the mission first.
>
> I will never accept defeat.
>
> I will never quit.
>
> I will never leave a fallen comrade.
>
> I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.
>
> I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.
>
> I am an expert and a professional. I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.
>
> I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.
>
> I am an American Soldier. (ADP, 2019, p. 9)

The Army ROTC developed a creed similar in nature to the Warrior Creed with language specific to the mission of the ROTC to develop future commissioned officer military leaders. This is articulated in the Cadet Creed:

> I am an Army Cadet.
>
> Soon I will take an oath and become an Army Officer committed to defending

the values which make this nation great.

HONOR is my touchstone. I understand MISSION first and PEOPLE always.

I am the PAST: the spirit of those WARRIORS who have made the final sacrifice.

I am the PRESENT: the scholar and apprentice soldier enhancing my skills in the science of warfare and the art of leadership.

But, above all, I am the FUTURE: the future WARRIOR LEADER of the United States Army. May God give me the compassion and judgment to lead and the gallantry to WIN.

I WILL do my duty. (U.S. Army Cadet Command, 2018, p. 2)

The final two attributes of character are display empathy and good discipline. Empathy allows the leader to anticipate what others are feeling and how the leader's decisions will affect them. Empathy enables clearer communication and constitutes the leader's desire to care for soldiers and others (ADP, 2019). Discipline is the ability to control one's behaviors. Discipline is completing tasks to standards without taking shortcuts and is enforcing standards impartially and consistently (ADP, 2019). Discipline in essence is doing the right thing when no one is watching.

Presence. Presence reflects the characteristics open to display by the leader. Leader presence shows where a leader stands and how they expect others to carry themselves. Four sub-attributes for presence include military and professional bearing, fitness, confidence, and resilience. Presence includes how the leader carries themselves to include their outward appearance, demeanor, and their words and actions (Seton Hall University, 2015). A strong leader presence is easily detectable and a comforting site

during stressful situations. Military and professional bearing refers to projecting a professional image of authority. Fitness refers to a leader's physical capabilities such as strength, endurance, and overall health, but it also relates to emotional health and the ability to endure over a stressful environment. Confidence the ability to project self-confidence and confidence in the leader's unit while demonstrating composure over one's emotions (ADP, 2019). During ROTC training, cadets are challenged with numerous opportunities to build confidence in themselves and their fellow cadets. One example is the 90-foot rappelling tower. During this training, cadets climb to the top of the tower and then are expected to attach themselves to a rope and rappel down the side of the tower. Not only are they gaining personal confidence in themselves, but they are also gaining confidence in their instructors, their equipment, and the cadet at the bottom of the tower, who is serving as their belay-man, or their "emergency brake" should the cadet on the rope lose control and begin to fall. Resilience is the final attribute of presence. Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from setbacks, shock, injuries, and adversity while maintaining mission and organizational focus (ADP, 2019).

Intellect. Intellect is the mental and social abilities the leader applies while leading. Intellect enables leaders to think creatively and critically to gain situational understanding, make sound judgments, solve problems, and take action (ADP, 2019). Five attributes fall under intellect: mental agility, sound judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, and expertise. Mental agility is anticipating or adapting to uncertain or changing situations with the ability to apply multiple perspectives and approaches (ADP, 2019). Sound judgment is the ability to assess situations shrewdly and draw sound conclusions. Innovation is the ability to introduce new ideas based on opportunities while

applying creativity to the circumstance (Seton Hall University, 2015). Interpersonal tact refers to the ability to effectively interact with others, understanding their character, motives, and reactions while recognizing diversity and displaying self-control. Lastly, expertise is having a high level of competence and knowledge in an area with the ability to draw and apply logical conclusions (Seton Hall University, 2015).

Leader Competencies

Leader competencies provide a clear and consistent way of conveying expectations for Army leaders. These competencies can be developed and continuously refined to proficiently apply them to increasingly complex situations (Seton Hall University, 2015). The three core competencies in the ALRM that the Army expects leaders to do are lead, develop, and achieve. The three leader competencies are divided into 10 competencies displayed in Figure 3 depicting the ALRM under the Do subheadings.

Lead. ADP 6-22 (2019) defined lead as providing purpose, direction, motivation, and building trust. There are five competencies that fall under leads: leads others, builds trust, extends influence beyond the chain of command, leads by example, and communicates. “Leads others” specifically refers to influencing members in the leader’s organization. Influence refers to how people affect the intentions, attitudes, and actions of another person or group of people and depends upon the relationship developed between the leaders and others (ADP, 2019). Leading also relates to compliance and commitment. The leader must have both to be successful. Compliance to orders and directives are always required and only affects the follower’s behavior. Commitment refers to the

willingness of the follower and produces longer lasting effects on the organization (ADP, 2019).

"Builds trust" encompasses reliance upon others, confidence in their abilities, and sets the conditions for teamwork. Trust includes fostering positive relations with others and finding commonality such as goals and experience, and keeping people informed of goals and results. "Extends influence beyond the chain of command" refers to the ability to influence different groups in various situations, particularly where no specific chain of authority exists (ADP, 2019, p. 5-9). Leaders, particularly officers, are often placed in roles with little experience and are expected to influence those outside of their chain of command to influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors to achieve a common goal (ADP, 2019). "Leads by example" means others learn to be, know, and do based upon following their leader. Drawing from experiential learning theory, leaders learn from their own experiences and observing others. Leaders who follow the Army Values and Warrior Ethos set positive examples, and therefore, why those character attributes are taught during the MS I year for all cadets. These are foundational concepts. Lastly, the competency of "communicates" refers to the ability to communicate to generate shared understanding and situational awareness. This also includes the ability to listen attentively to verbal and nonverbal cues, expressing thoughts and ideas, and demonstrating respect for others (ADP, 2019).

Develops. Develops includes developing themselves and their subordinates and building a positive climate. There are four competencies that fall under develops: creates a positive environment, prepares self, develops others, and stewards of the profession. "Creates a positive environment" promotes teamwork and a healthy climate and culture

exist from the leader's actions and attitudes. This results from building trust on the team, encouraging initiative and demonstrating care for everyone on the team. As the cadets develop, they learn that care for everyone on the team extends to the team's family. "Prepares self" relates to being a continuous learner to include maintaining self-discipline, physical fitness, and mental well-being. Leaders continue to improve their technical, tactical, and leadership expertise (ADP, 2019). "Develops others" includes proactively supporting the development of others' knowledge, capabilities, and readiness to learn. This is inclusive of balancing the long-term needs of the Army, the near-term and career needs of their subordinates, and the immediate needs of their unit's mission (ADP, 2019). During ROTC training, cadets begin to learn that a complimentary relationship exists because when the leader invests more time in developing others, the personal, mental, and emotional development of self increases and truly builds the Army value of selfless service. The development of others is also complementary to creating a positive environment in the organization. When subordinates observe through the leader actions that the leader cares about the subordinate's career development, the subordinate is more inclined to provide a stronger effort to help the unit succeed. Subsequently, this benefits the leader overall success in achieving results. Lastly, "stewards of the profession" equates to applying good stewardship to resources within reach and his/her actions show commitment to the professional strengths of the U.S. Army (Seton Hall University, 2015).

Achieves. Achieves includes getting results and completing tasks on time to the standard. The former United States Army Chief of Staff, General James C. McConville emphasized leadership priorities to the Army were laser focused on two points: people

first and results matter. Getting results focuses tasks, priorities, people, and other resources to achieve the desired outcomes. Getting results is achieved by ensuring a course of action achieves the desired outcome through planning, keeping followers focused on the vision and plan, mediating peer conflicts, removing barriers, and recognizing individual and team accomplishments (ADP, 2019). Achieving results is the result of modeling the Army attributes and continuously improving and learning through experience the Army competencies.

Competency-Based Studies

Multiple studies showed leadership competencies-based findings as a result of leadership development reflective of ROTC training (Campbell, 2017; Gilson et al., 2015; Johnston, 2010) and nonmilitary training (Denecker, 2016; Fredericks, 2009; Rosch & Caza, 2012). Building leadership capacities in college is both an art and a science. Rosch and Anthony (2012) stated, to maximize student learning potential, leadership educators should develop explicit leadership-oriented learning outcomes. Learning content should be designed and arranged to help students develop effective attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to their leadership behaviors. This learning content is reflective of the "being," "knowing," and "doing" is seen in the military leadership development programs (Hesselbein & Shinseki, 2004).

Campbell (2017) found character and confidence as key attributes identified as consistent themes when studying Army ROTC cadets returning from CST. Additionally, he noted the ability to recognize diversity in backgrounds, cultures, and experiences (i.e., intellect) was described as an enabler to lead others when placed in a leadership role. Cadets commented how there were cadets mixed from all around the country, and they

were able to effectively work together and take direction from one another to complete the task at hand. Likewise, Gilson et al. (2015) noted increases in confidence after completing tasks in which the cadets had little experience such as marching a company sized element of 120 cadets around the garrison or successfully completing nighttime land navigation. The cadets commented on the ability to be an agile leader by remaining flexible as situations changed such as the weather impacting the training and being able to create a positive environment for their team to keep everyone focused. This positive outlook helped shape the team building, which then led to the platoon success. Lastly, Johnston (2010) conducted in a quantitative study of 133 noncontracted Army ROTC cadets from three universities in the Midwest. A noncontracted cadet is generally a cadet in the 1st or 2nd year of ROTC who has not decided sign a contract to join the Army as either an officer or enlisted soldier. In this study, the competencies of develop self and goal attainment (i.e., get results) were most prevalent. While other attributes and competencies were being constructed through experience in the program, cadets appeared to reflect inwardly toward themselves versus outwardly to discuss developing others or the unit.

In nonmilitary studies, attributes and competencies are identified in a different manner but can be understood through a military interpretation. Denecker (2016) studied 28 superintendents across the state of Ohio who were chosen to participate in a formal leadership program in the Ohio School Leadership Institute. The goal was to hone their strengths and weaknesses around leadership competencies and behavior. The results indicated improvements in self-awareness and reflection to prepare self, which translated into plans to set personal goals. The superintendents also discussed working with their

administrative teams to help them set up personal and professional goals so that the entire group might work together and hold one another accountable (i.e., develop others). Similarly, Fredericks (2009) highlighted that leaders reported increases in care taking and authenticity. Mission, responsibility, authenticity, and care taking were the emerging themes in this study. The attribute of authenticity related most closely to presence and confidence. All the participants spoke about authenticity as consisting of two elements: the ability to be yourself regardless of the activity and being comfortable in your role. Caretaking was an essential competency related to the leaders. Care taking included treating people with dignity and respect, being kind in word and deed, and giving people an opportunity to be successful.

Rosch and Caza (2012) conducted a quantitative study of short-term leadership programs using the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale to assess leadership competencies developed during short duration leadership programs. The researchers analyzed the eight competencies from the social change model of leadership development, which include: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. The results indicated that well-structured short-term programs can impact student leadership competencies long after attendance. Students reported greater competency on measures of capacity for commitment, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship, but no apparent effect resulted from training on their capacity for congruence or change (Rosch & Caza, 2012). Rosch and Caza (2012) concluded mastering more complex skills such as moral reasoning and systems thinking may be better accomplished in a long-term educational structure.

Student-Centered Versus Teacher-Centered Learning

Jonas-Dwyer and Pospisil (2004) indicated the dilemma in higher education today is the ability to adapt to this generation of students as roles of the university will have to be reshaped to meet the learning needs of these students. Traditional, teacher-centered andragogy may have to give way to a more holistic approach toward learning styles adopting a more learner-centered andragogy in higher education. Additional learning strategies include collaborative learning, service learning, experiential learning, authentic learning, and outcomes-based education (Weimer, 2002). These learning styles can be beneficial in taking the application of what the student learned and applying those experiences to real life experiences (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004).

Student-centered learning is rooted in constructivist learning theory and experiential learning theory. The student-centered learning concept is originally credited to Hayward in 1905 and later to Dewey in 1956; however, Carl Rogers is credited with expanding this approach to education (O'Sullivan, 2004). The main principles of Rogers's student-centered learning approach include student autonomy where students take ownership of their learning goals, active learning where students are engaged in their learning through hands on activities and group work, and recognizing student diversity with respect to diverse backgrounds, experience, and learning styles of students (Burnard, 1999; Lea et al., 2003; Rogers, 1983). Additionally, O'Neill and McMahon (2005) noted Rogers's student-centered learning focused on collaborative learning where students work together to solve problems and share their knowledge and ideas. The last principle was reflection and evaluation where students were encouraged to reflect on their learning experience and evaluate their progress toward their learning goals.

Student-centered learning is a much different approach than teacher-centered learning. Student-centered learning places the learner in the center of the process where students become active participants in what they learn (Crumly et al., 2014; Weimer, 2003). The learners select what to study, which encourages students to do more learning through discovery and from each other (Weimer, 2003). Much more interaction occurs between students and peers and between students and instructors versus more teacher centric andragogy. Student-centered learning provides opportunities for learners to be self-directed, set goals and timelines, and determine how material will be delivered (Gerasimiak, 2022). As is evident in the literature review, Army ROTC programs follow an experiential student-centered learning andragogy in which the ROTC cadets "run" the ROTC program and direct the program to train both peers and subordinate cadets throughout the semester, and the professor of military science serves as the overall guide for the program.

Student-centered instruction incorporates teaching strategies that allow for the student to construct knowledge through meaningful experiences (Van de Walle & Lovin, 2006). Teacher-centered instruction incorporates teaching strategies that include teachers transferring knowledge to students directly through lectures, drill and practice, or guided discovery (Van de Walle & Lovin, 2006). Newer generations of students responded to active learning instructional approaches that passive teaching styles did not offer (Monaco & Martin, 2007). Teachers, faculty, and campus administrators evolve in their roles and composition such as percentage of full-time versus adjunct or tenure ineligible faculty and need to understand the needs of the current learning consumer, who are the Generation Z students born in a digital world. Technology also plays a major role in

student learning, and thus, students tended to respond poorly to traditional classroom teaching methods, such as lectures (Weimer, 2003). According to Armbruster et al. (2009), "The traditional lecture model can often lead to students completing their undergraduate education without skills that are important for professional success" (p. 203). Smith and Stein (2011) cautioned the instructional practices that are orchestrated in U.S. classrooms are not preparing students for a successful transition into the 21st century workforce. Today's global marketplace needs individuals who can think, reason, and engage effectively in quantitative problem solving while navigating tasks that allow for the construction of knowledge within the confines of their prior understandings (Smith & Stein, 2011). Finally, Kahl and Venette (2010) argued critical workforce skills missing in many current university graduates such as flexibility and adaptability to change are skills that are very hard to develop in teacher-centered learning.

In teacher-centered learning, the teacher is the primary source of knowledge and the students put most of their focus on the teacher (Crumly et al., 2014). The teacher passively passes the knowledge to the students with little input from the student. Teacher-centered learning has been the primary teaching pedagogy since the Industrial Age and still provides numerous benefits including efficiency, where it allows teachers to deliver information to a large group of students quickly without requiring a lot of preparation or individual attention (Crumly et al., 2014). Teacher-centered learning lends itself well to traditional forms of assessment to include quizzes and tests to provide a clear measure of students' progress (Agrahari, 2016). Additional benefits include providing a foundation of knowledge for students to build upon in future learning experiences and a sense of

respect and authority for the teacher, which can aid in a more focused and disciplined classroom (Thamraksa, 2003).

In the Army ROTC program, apart from the lecture, which has the teacher-led instruction that can be most prevalent, the cadets guide and direct the program. The role of the professor of military science and a small group, typically between two to four active-duty officers and noncommissioned officers' cadre, who serve as guides for the program. The MS IV cadets conduct training meetings at the beginning of the semester and plan and coordinate the training events for the semester to prepare the MS III cadets to successfully negotiate the leadership development assessment course at the end of the spring semester. The cadet leadership team coordinates with campus administrators for facility use and coordinates for transportation when required for training events with oversight from the ROTC cadre. Additionally, cadets coordinate with affiliated and partnership universities for shared facility use and opportunities for recruiting events at selected schools. All training is reviewed and planned with approval from the professor of military science. MS IV cadet planning is detailed down to coordinating peer assessment and feedback sessions with MS III and MS II Cadets.

MS III cadets similarly are expected to execute the training coordinated by the MS IV cadets. Once MS III cadets receive the operations order from the MS IV leadership, they are expected to plan, coordinate and execute the training events with delegation to subordinate MS I and MS II cadets. Again, active-duty cadre provide oversight, but they allow time and space for the cadets to develop and execute their plans. Errors and mistakes are viewed as learning events and are captured on peer assessments. Cadets are expected to collaborate with one another to achieve the mission successfully.

The student-centered experiential learning enables the cadets to be actively engaged in the learning process and are encouraged to take ownership of their own learning. Student-centered learning fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as cadets are given opportunities to think and reason for themselves, while simultaneously increasing motivation and interest in the program. For MS I and MS II cadets who are not contracted, this learner-centered approach is highly beneficial for retention in the ROTC program (Johnston, 2010). Every campus-based ROTC program has a dedicated mission to commission a required number of cadets for each year group. Active engagement in the program creates a positive environment for cadets to desire to remain involved and pursue their goals of becoming a commissioned officer (Johnston, 2010).

Multiple studies across a wide variety of sample populations have supported both the pros and cons of student-centered instruction versus teacher-centered instruction (Arif, 2021; Casteel & Bridges, 2007; Garner, 2015; Kraus & Sears, 2008; Tran, 2014). Garner (2015) conducted a mixed methods research study on the impact of student-centered learning in mathematics. The first research question addressed how a student-centered learning environment, which encompasses both problem-based and procedural homework tasks, impacts high achieving seventh grade students' ability to be successful on summative assessments. Garner (2015) indicated the student-centered learning environment led to a higher success rate on summative assessments. Additionally, it led to better understanding and increased ability to communicate mathematical reasoning on summative assessments, and students exhibited a deeper understanding of the mathematical concepts when taught from a student-centered rather than teacher-centered environment. These trends were statistically significant (Garner, 2015). The second

research question addressed the perceptions of high achieving seventh grade students when their instruction changed from teacher-centered to student-centered. The findings indicated that although the initial shift from a teacher- to student-centered environment was frustrating to students, they quickly showed signs of approval toward the intervention (Garner, 2015). The analysis also indicated the students enjoyed the problem tasks and appreciated working together to communicate their mathematical thinking (Garner, 2015).

Casteel and Bridges (2007) found that upper-division psychology students rated seminar courses with student-led discussion groups more favorably than traditionally taught courses. Kraus and Sears (2008) found classroom behaviors that help this generation of students feel connected and engaged in the learning process through student-centered learning engagement are linked to increased learning outcomes, a greater sense of belonging in the classroom, and peer collaboration. Tran (2014) conducted an experimental study on the effects of student-centered learning on achievement and knowledge retention of 110 1st-year primary education students toward the psychology subject over the 8 weeks of instruction. Tran (2014) reported after approximately 8 weeks, students who were instructed using student-centered learning achieved significantly higher scores on the achievement and knowledge retention posttests than did students who were instructed using lecture-based teaching. Lastly, Arif (2021) conducted a qualitative study on 23 students in an eco-systems course at a small university in California. The course was 26 weeks in duration with the first 13 weeks composed of teacher-centered lecture. The last 13 weeks was student-center focused, which was more open ended and permitted synthesis of the first half of the course. At the

end of the course, students completed a survey and reported greater than 80% of the students reported finding the course intellectually stimulating, valuable, and found the course became more interesting as the weeks grew. Further the students found the evaluations fair and appropriate, and students were encouraged to participate and share their ideas and knowledge. Finally, they preferred the learning style of this course over others at the same university (Arif, 2021).

Student-centered learning is not without its critics. Student-centered learning can be time-consuming for both teachers and students, as it often requires more planning, preparation, and individual attention. Wright (2011) stated challenges with student-centered learning include the balance of power in the classroom, the function of the course content, the role of the teacher versus the role of the student, the responsibility of learning, and the purpose and processes of evaluation. According to Wright (2011), professors struggle conveying control with new students. Course outlines, attendance policies, and schedules create a feeling of directives toward a new student, and they may feel intimidated and anxious versus empowered. Professors can overcome this by providing options for assignments from the first day of class. Weimer (2002) explained professors are challenged to convert course content from not focusing on the content as an end result but rather to help students learn through conceptualization and constructive interaction with the subject manner.

Further student-centered learning can lack structure and direction, which can make it difficult for students who are used to more traditional forms of instruction. Cornelius and Gordon (2008) found that student-centered learning, which was facilitated by flexibility in content delivery, was able to accommodate individual student learning

needs. Like the balance of power, the professor who typically served as the provider for the learning activities has to learn to serve more as a guide and facilitator. The responsibility of learning shifts to the student. Student-centered learning can be met with resistance from students who are not used to taking an active role in their own learning, or from parents and administrators who are more comfortable with traditional forms of instruction (Wright, 2011). Student-centered learning can make traditional forms of assessment, such as quizzes and exams, more difficult, as it may be harder to objectively measure student progress. Wright (2011) explained course objectives and learning goals must be clearly stated and students must be taught how to evaluate their own work and that of their peers by asking critical questions in a constructive manner. Lastly, student-centered learning can be more difficult to implement with large groups of students, as it may be challenging to provide individualized attention and feedback to each student (Weimer, 2002).

Peer Leadership

Just as significant as the use of experiential learning is in the ROTC model, so is the use of peer leadership in the developmental process for each cadet. The interaction among peers is beneficial for the overall student development. Edelman et al. (2004) defined this peer leadership as the process in which group members of peers come together to interact and make decisions to accomplish a goal strengthens the overall leadership development of the students. The role peers assume in human development has been widely documented in educational contexts (Astin, 1993; Cuseo, 2010; Ender & Newton, 2010; Keup, 2010). Astin (1993) claimed the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate

years. Keup (2010) agreed, indicating peers not only influenced developmental processes but were also instrumental in interacting with and encouraging other students to become involved on their campus. Cuseo (2010) stated peer leaders are perceived as more approachable and less judgmental than an authority figure.

Peer leadership is an essential component of the ROTC program to assist with assessment, evaluation, and feedback for all cadets in preparation for CST. Peer leadership is observable throughout the function of the ROTC program from the MS I year through the MS IV year. The MS IV cadets, who are the seniors, provide oversight and direction to the MS III, junior year cadets. The MS III cadets, who are evaluated by the MS IV cadets, oversee the MS II and MS I cadets and are responsible for the execution of the training. MS II cadets will have responsibility for squad sized elements consisting of six to ten cadets from the MS I, freshmen year cadets. MS I cadets may have responsibility over a team sized element of two to four cadets. Generally, peer evaluations are not conducted as a routine operation until cadets become MS IIIs. In the Army ROTC, MS IV cadets receive specific training on the ALRM and the counseling form to provide quality assessments to the MS III cadets. Keup (2010) argued that training is important for developing the capabilities and skills to be a peer leader. He defined peer leader as students who have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their peers. In addition to benefits to the recipients from peer leadership, there are notable benefits for the peer leaders.

Frade and Tiroyabone (2017) conducted a study on the development and experiences of 466 peer leaders at six South African institutions of higher education. Peer leaders were requested to report their growth in four outcome areas, namely, the

development of skills, the undergraduate experience, employability outcomes, and academic performance. Frade and Tiroyabone (2017) indicated the peer leaders reported significant increases in development in interpersonal communication, leadership, and teamwork as the top three skills. Regarding the university experience, the top three experiences included: being provided with opportunities for meaningful interactions with their peers, interacting with and understanding people from diverse backgrounds, and interacting with staff members. Regarding employability, Frade and Tiroyabone (2017) indicated developing trust and open lines of communication enhanced their ability to build professional interpersonal relationships. The second and third highest gains as reported were being able to analyze problems from a new perspective and creating innovative approaches to a task. Lastly, the peer leaders reported very limited gains in academic skills.

Baker (2011) conducted a quantitative study to analyze the most effective leadership competencies observed with respect to peer leadership at ROTC programs during the leadership development assessment course from 1999–2009. The four pillars or competencies most observed regarding ROTC peer leadership were communication, support, hard work ethic, and reflection/feedback (Baker, 2011). These pillars closely mirror the preferred pillars of Generation Z students.

Conclusion

The ROTC program provides an experiential learning environment for leadership development for its cadets to develop the leader traits found in the ALRM. The importance of student-centered education has clearly been documented through current research and a review of the literature of theory. Although I have highlighted challenges

with implementation of student-centered learning, the overarching consensus in this literature review indicated the application of student-centered learning model in a classroom can lead to more effective learning outcomes, increased autonomy, engagement, confidence, critical-thinking skills, and a more meaningful learning experience (Arif, 2021). Based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory, knowledge is attained by a combination of discussion and interaction with others. That means knowledge is coconstructed, with the teacher serving more as a facilitator than a sage on the stage. The experiential learning structure of Army ROTC provides ample opportunity for cadets to direct the program and construct new knowledge based on experience during their 4 years of participation. Further, cadet evaluation and assessment focused on the Army attributes and competencies from peer leaders enables durable behavioral learning outcomes observed during CST and post-CST. Therefore, both theory and literature support that learning takes place best when done where collaboration and a proactive approach to experiential learning takes place, resulting in a positive and durable learning experience. This type of learning environment is highly compatible with the behaviors and characteristics of Generation Z students, which fill today's colleges and universities.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The methodology chapter describes the lens and investigative approach I used to understand leadership development in Generation Z Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) cadets. The intent of the methodology chapter is to educate the reader to the intent of qualitative research reflecting on the specific design, the role I served in the study, protocols for recording and analyzing data, and accounting for the accuracy and validity of the data (Creswell, 2014). This study sought to understand how Generation Z Army ROTC cadets described their leadership development experience. The Army has codified leadership capabilities using the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ALRM). The ALRM describes what an Army leader is (i.e., the attributes) and what an Army leader does (i.e., the competencies; ADRP, 2012). Using the ALRM as a guiding document, this study was designed to understand the development of leadership competencies and attributes to shape leader identity as described by Army ROTC Generation Z cadets at an ROTC program on a college campus in which student-centered learning is used as their andragogy. My research was intended to directly address the gap in the literature with Generation Z leadership development through an in-depth, qualitative examination of Army ROTC cadet leadership experiences and leader identity through achieving durable leadership attributes and competencies. Additionally, my research explored how Army ROTC cadets perceived peer leadership impacting their leadership development. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found peer leadership contributed to students' success in promoting retention (i.e., persistence to graduation),

learning and academic performance, social and emotional development, and reported career success.

The results of this study may provide application for other campus-based leadership development programs to gain durable results. I assert this study filled multiple gaps in the literature. First, limited research exists that specifically addresses leadership development in ROTC programs regarding Generation Z students, particularly because the oldest representatives from this generation are 26 years old and most likely graduated college in the past 4 years. Secondly, there is very little literature on student centered learning in conjunction with Generation Z ROTC students. According to Hightower et al. (2011), research has demonstrated that student-centered learning approaches are efficacious in improving student learning. Lastly, there is a significant gap in the literature analyzing peer leadership development of ROTC military cadet training regardless of the student generation. This chapter describes the research design, population and sampling design, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, validity, trustworthiness triangulation, role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and summary sections (Creswell, 2014).

Research Questions

The purpose of my research was to determine how Generation Z Army ROTC cadets describe and interpret their leadership development experience.

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

How do Army ROTC cadets describe their leadership development experience? The purpose of this question was to provide an active voice to the participant to share their lived experience during their participation as an ROTC cadet.

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Does the Army leadership development experimental learning model produce durable leadership attributes and competencies to shape leader identity in Generation Z Army ROTC cadets? The purpose of this research question was to gain perspective on their thoughts as they relate to leadership attributes and competencies. The question focused on self-reflection and student views on their individual identities as they practice leadership on campus and at cadet summer training (CST).

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

How do Army ROTC cadets perceive peer leadership impacting their leadership development? The purpose of this research question was to gain the ROTC cadets' perspective on their thoughts as they reflect on their personal experience serving as a peer leader, how it influenced their leadership development, and how their peer leadership impacted other ROTC cadets.

Research Design

This study used interpretive phenomenological analysis, which is a qualitative approach with a constructivist worldview used to provide detailed examinations of lived personal experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Qualitative research, with its historical origins from anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation, is used to explore the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a human problem (Creswell, 2014). In this study, qualitative research allowed the voice of the ROTC cadet to be heard and for me to make interpretations of the meaning of the data collected. Van Kaam (1966) believed qualitative research provided for the full meaning and richness of human behavior allowing the researcher to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a

reflective analysis that portrays the essence of the experience. The assumption in qualitative research is the learning comes from the participant and is exploratory. This typically means not much has been written on the topic or population being studied allowing the researcher to build an understanding from what was heard from the participant (Creswell, 2014).

This study followed a constructivist worldview. Worldview is defined as "a basic set of beliefs that guide an action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Constructivism means individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are variable and lead the researcher to seek complexity of views versus narrow meanings and rely on as much as possible on the participants views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2014). In this study, Army ROTC cadets shared their experiences gained through time spent as both a leader and follower both on campus and during the CST after their junior year, which allowed me to gather meaning to understand their leadership development in terms of the leadership attributes and competencies and peer leadership.

According to Van Maanen (2014), phenomenology is a self-reflective pathos of reflecting and discerning meaning in sensing the world of things, others, and self. The phenomenological researcher must adopt a phenomenological reflective attitude, which will permit one to start to wonder about the lived meaning of ordinary phenomena and events. Phenomenology tries to describe the prereflective meaning of the living now. Van Maanen (2014) explained there are two kinds of temporal presence. The first is the lived presence of the immediate now, which is the presence we are always in as we live our lives from moment to moment. The second is the presence of the now mediated, in other words, reflecting back on the feelings, emotions, and actions of the prior experience of

the cadets, which may provide insight to the researcher. Moustakas (1994) explained the primary target of phenomenological knowledge is the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original descriptions of experience. It is not concerned with matters of fact but seeks to determine meaning. Additionally, Moustakas (1994) further explained phenomenology offers direct insight into the essence of things growing out of reflective description, and it seeks to obtain knowledge through a state of pure subjectivity while retaining the values of thinking and reflecting.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach that examines how people make sense of their major life experiences. In other words, it is focused on exploring experiences in their own terms (Smith et al., 2014). IPA is advantageous to the researcher because it allows for a strong bonding relationship between the researcher and the research participants. IPA provides significant opportunities for the researcher to understand the innermost deliberation of the "lived experiences" of research participants (Alase, 2017, p. 12). For example, cadets participating in an overnight field training exercise during the winter months may provide details on how they were able to complete a nighttime land navigation course successfully. As they reflect on the experience, they could provide additional details of the personal emotions and decision making to go back outside to support a fellow cadet who was struggling to complete the course understanding they were cold and tired, which demonstrated empathy and care for a subordinate or peer to help them succeed. In this example, the details from the field training exercise show how the researcher can provide a rich description of the experience in the eyes of the cadet. Further, the researcher can deduce from the story how the successful cadet learned how to lead with empathy and set

the example for other cadets. Smith et al. (2014) explained when people are engaged in "an experience" of something major in their lives, they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening, and IPA research aims to engage in these reflections (p. 72). Secondly, IPA shares the view that humans are sense-making creatures; therefore, all accounts by participants reflects their attempts to make sense of their experience.

The aims of IPA research generally focus on people's experiences and/or understandings with the focus on the interpretation of meaning. With IPA, the researcher assumes that the data can inform something about the people's orientation and involvement in the world and how they make sense of it (Smith et al., 2014). Smith et al. (2009) argued that the bottom line with IPA, which is "participant-oriented," is that the approach is more concerned with the "human lived experience, and posits that experience can be understood via an examination of the meanings which people impress upon it" (p. 34). Smith et al. (2009) asserted that making sense of what is being said or written involves close interpretative engagement on the part of the listener or reader. Because IPA is concerned with the examination of the lived experience, the primary research question should not be too grand or ambitious in reach and can be a more open kind of research question (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2014). In this study, the primary research question was: how do Army ROTC cadets describe their leadership development experience? The question follows this direction. Additionally, Smith et al. (2014) and Creswell (2013) recommended a second tier or theory-driven research question to supplement the study as these can be answered at a more interpretive stage. These questions are not hypotheses; they engage with a theory but do not test it. In this study, the secondary questions, "Does the Army leadership development experimental learning

model produce durable leadership attributes and competencies in Generation Z Army ROTC cadets?" and "How do Army ROTC cadets perceive peer leadership impacting their leadership development?" compliment the study and follow the aforementioned recommendations of Smith et al. and Creswell.

Setting

ROTC has operated on college campuses throughout the United States since 1916, with some periods of closure (Neiberg, 2000). I collected data from the Army ROTC program from a university in New Jersey. According to the Carnegie Classification System, this university is categorized as a 4-year private, not for profit university with a total student population of 9881, of which 6063 are undergraduates, and a 15:1 student to faculty ratio as of Fall 2021. This university is Carnegie classified as a doctoral university with high research activity (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023). The university receives institutional accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. It has an 83% retention rate for 1st to 2nd year students, with a 67% 4-year graduation rate for students pursuing a bachelor's degree and a 72% overall graduation rate (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023). The university is classified as a host institution with 22 affiliated institutions. The host institution designates where all the ROTC training for all military science course levels is conducted. The affiliated schools, which include Montclair State University, William Patterson University, Rutgers Newark Campus, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Stevens Institute, New Jersey City University, Caldwell University and others, all are part of an agreement to allow their students to participate in the university Army ROTC. I selected the Army ROTC program because it uses a student-centered learning approach

with experiential learning as the primary method for their leadership training program. I have confirmed this is accurate from discussions with the professor of military science at this university in addition to 4 years of personal experience as an assistant professor of military science at this university from 2006–2010.

Sample and Population Participants

In line with qualitative research designs, I selected participants for this study in a purposeful manner (Creswell, 2014). IPA research study should select participants from a homogeneous sample pool to understand the true make-up of the research subject matter to get "rich" and "thick descriptions" of the "lived experiences" of the research participants (Alase, 2017, p. 13). Creswell (2014) stated all participants having similar lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied is essential. Smith et al. (2014) explained, "Samples are selected purposively (rather than through probability methods) because they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience" (p. 48).

According to Smith et al. (2014), because IPA is concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular context, IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes. They suggested between three and six participants are a reasonable size for IPA research. Creswell (2014) suggested between three and 10 participants are reasonable for a phenomenological study. Smith et al. (2014) noted sample size consideration is important because the researcher should provide a rich, transparent, and contextualized analysis of the accounts of the participants, which will enable the readers to evaluate the transferability to the individuals in the context.

I recruited eight Army ROTC cadets from this university after receiving permission from this university's professor of military science (PMS). The PMS is the

lead instructor and overall person in charge of the ROTC program. The PMS is generally in the rank of lieutenant colonel and has completed a successful battalion sized command and multiple operational level assignments prior to being selected from a competitive hiring process. Specifically, I requested cadets who were currently in their senior year of college and participating in the Military Science Level 4 (MS IV). Further, as part of my purposeful selection, I requested those cadets who had completed all 4 years of the ROTC leadership training, completed the cadet summer training course at Fort Knox, and did not have prior military service prior to participating in the ROTC program. I was specifically looking for a homogenous group of cadets who started at the same developmental level as Military Science Level 1 (MS I) during their freshmen year and now have a total of 4 years of leadership development training. I requested MS IV cadets who are serving in key leadership positions on the cadet officer staff, for example, the cadet battalion commander, cadet executive officer, cadet operations officer, cadet command sergeants major, or cadets serving cadet company level training officers. These positions are the most senior cadet level position, and they were selected for these positions by the PMS based on their performance at CST and in the program.

Because this study used ROTC cadets, I opted to maintain the participants' privacy with the use of pseudonyms by using the military phonetic alphabet to represent each participant. Overall, these cadets came from diverse backgrounds, with different motivations for joining ROTC and varied interests and achievements in high school. They all demonstrated passion and commitment to their chosen paths, eager to serve in the military and excel as future leaders.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Major	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Prior Service
Alpha	Business	22	Male	Asian American	No
Bravo	Diplomacy	22	Male	Caucasian	No
Charlie	Business	22	Female	African American	No
Delta	Business	22	Male	Caucasian	No
Echo	History	22	Male	Caucasian	No
Foxtrot	Sociology	22	Female	Caucasian	No
Golf	Diplomacy	22	Male	African American	No
Hotel	Diplomacy	23	Male	Caucasian	No

ALPHA

Cadet Alpha was a participant in Army ROTC and attended an affiliated university of the host institution. He grew up in New Jersey and joined ROTC to secure a better future in his career. He had one older sister and used to play lacrosse in high school. His hobbies included snowboarding and going to the shooting range, although he did not own any weapons due to his parents' restrictions. He had a more reserved personality and was interested in pursuing a full-time career in the civilian sector and a part-time military career as an officer.

BRAVO

Cadet Bravo hailed from Maine and had one sister and both parents. He participated in sports including basketball, track, and baseball in high school. He was

attracted to this university for its diplomacy program and ROTC. He was a 3-year ROTC scholarship winner. He indicated he comfortably adapted to moving from a small community to the fast-paced location of this university close to New York City.

CHARLIE

Cadet Charlie was born in Fort Stewart, with her dad having served in the Army for 20 years. She grew up on Long Island, New York and chose ROTC over attending West Point. Her father had been on two deployments, and she had four brothers and two stepsisters. She ran track, cross country, and swam in high school and was vice president of a business club called DEKA.

DELTA

Cadet Delta, a native of Texas, was inspired to join the military at a young age. He eventually chose ROTC after a recruiter convinced him it would be a better path. He had a twin brother and was the first in his family to go to college. In high school, he was involved in the marching band, the police department's explorer program, and an active athlete in sports like football and powerlifting. He also was enticed to enroll in this university when he realized the proximity to New York City.

ECHO

Cadet Echo was a senior majoring in history with a minor in political science. He planned to branch as active-duty infantry. He enjoyed CrossFit and was a fan of baseball, hockey, and football. He had a brother and two younger sisters. In high school, he participated in wrestling, baseball, and several clubs, including the Italian Honor Society. He enjoyed the outdoors and grew up on a Christmas tree farm. He had quite the suave

personality as he indicated he enjoyed sitting on the back porch of his home with his dog smoking a cigar and watching the creek behind his home.

FOXTROT

Cadet Foxtrot is from New Jersey and joined ROTC as a freshman in the nursing program. She changed majors after the first year as it was not compatible with her ROTC obligations, which she enjoyed. She had a twin brother. Her parents always expected her brother would be the one to join the military; however, she was who contacted the military recruiters. She worked as a supervisor at an amusement park. She was into working out all the time and was focused on improving her 5-mile run time so she could attend Ranger school after she completed her officer basic course as an armor officer. She was involved in the marching band and various clubs during high school. She was never into physical fitness in high school and now scores the highest fitness score in the ROTC battalion.

GOLF

Cadet Golf was from the Midwest and was attracted to this university because of its diplomacy program. His dad was in the Air Force, and he thought he would be participating in the Air Force ROTC. In high school, he participated in soccer, volleyball, and the show choir. He cofounded a couple of clubs in high school and was a member of the debate club and French club. He was extremely energetic with an engaging personality. He indicated in high school he was much shyer and more reserved. He developed his confident personality when he got to the university.

HOTEL

Cadet Hotel was completing a 5-year bachelor's and master's program at the university. His father was a retired brigadier general in the National Guard, and his mother worked in sales. He had a sister and a stepbrother. He played football, wrestled, and competitively shot sporting clays in high school. He held a leadership position in the patriotic youth club and was also on an ROTC scholarship. Additionally, he achieved his Eagle Scout award. He was a persistent and resourceful individual who almost was removed from the program because of inaccurate medical issues but found the correct resources to remain in the program. He was high energy and looked forward to leading as an officer on active-duty status.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Creswell (2014) explained in qualitative research, data are collected in the field where participants experience the phenomena. Alase (2017) reminded everyone the lived experience of the participant must be allowed to tell the narration of the research study. IPA is best suited to one which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed first person account of their experiences. Researchers gather information by speaking directly to them and observing their behaviors and actions. The researcher collects the data through multiple sources of data versus relying on questionnaires or other instruments (Creswell, 2014). Once the data are collected, the researcher focuses on organizing it across multiple themes or categories. Finally, the researcher will triangulate the data based on converging multiple sources to build a coherent justification for the themes (Creswell, 2014). The data contributions in this study were from three sources, namely, a semistructured interview, observation, and documentation material.

Semistructured Interviews

I used semistructured interviews as my primary instrument to collect data. Semistructured interviews are standard procedure for phenomenological studies (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In a phenomenological research study, the process of collecting information involves primary in-depth interviews and it describes the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research interviews are described as "a conversation with a purpose" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). The purpose is informed by the research question. Interpretive phenomenological analysis recommends a small sample size for a more thorough analysis (Smith et al., 2014). I conducted eight semistructured interviews. According to Smith and Osborn (2015), the goal is to analyze in detail how participants perceive and make sense of things that are happening to them. It therefore requires a flexible data collection instrument. This enabled the participant to engage in the dialogue and enabled the researcher to modify the questions as the interview progresses based on the responses. This helped to create rapport, allowed the interviewer to probe and follow the interests or concerns of the respondent. Creswell (2014) highlighted the benefits of semistructured interviews include creating an opportunity for participants to provide historical information and allowing the researcher to control the line of questioning. Limitations of semistructured interviews include allowing indirect information from the views of the interviewees and an opportunity for researcher bias from the researcher's presence.

To conduct research and gather data on leadership development of Generation Z students, I first had to obtain permission from the university Army ROTC PMS and the eligibility of the cadets to meet the prescribed requirements for the study. Prior to the

interviews, I sent an email with some introductory questions, which were asked of the participants via email to confirm their eligibility for participation.

Based on the purpose of this study, I designed an interview protocol with interview questions that were used to elicit perceptions, experiences, and examples from their leadership development experience with the Army ROTC. This included questions centered around the leadership attributes and leadership competencies and questions related to their peer leadership experiences as both a leader and follower. My interview protocol included the heading identifying the date, location, interviewer, and participant. The interview protocol also included a set of instructions to be read to each participant to maintain a standard procedure, an ice breaker, and a gratitude statement at the end of the interview acknowledging the participant while asking for anyone else whom they believe may provide value to the study (Creswell, 2014).

Interview Process

The semistructured interviews occurred at the ROTC department at the university in New Jersey. Prior to conducting the study, I explained the study and procedure to the MS IV cadets, and they ultimately decided who should attend the study. Signed consent forms were provided to the participants and collected prior to the start of the semistructured interviews. The interviews were scheduled to last between 30–75 minutes in duration. As the interviews progressed, opportunities evolved to allow me to follow up from experiences discussed by other participants to gather multiple perspectives from some of the same events.

All interviews were audio recorded. The researcher received consent to audio record the entire interview from the participants prior to commencement of the interview.

The audio recordings were transcribed and then analyzed. Recording the interviews was crucial for proper analysis: Smith and Osborn (2015) argued researchers cannot do interpretive phenomenological interviews properly without recording them. The audio recording allowed the researcher to focus on not only the content of the message but also to capture notes from observations of the participant noting emotions expressed and anything else that stood out during the interview.

Transcription

I uploaded all interviews to an online transcription program. Once the transcripts were received back from the program, I reviewed them for accuracy and then provided them to the participants to review for up to 5 business days. This communication with the participants is known as member checking and provides the participant an opportunity to clarify anything they may have provided. Creswell (2014) explained member checking is not providing the raw transcript back to the applicant. It is providing parts of a polished or semipolished product with major findings or themes. This could involve contacting the participant for a follow-up interview.

Observations

The second method to collect data was through observation. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative observers can engage in roles varying from nonparticipant to a complete participant. The observations are open ended, and the researcher asks general questions allowing the participants to provide their view unencumbered. Further, observations provide the researcher firsthand experience with the participant (Creswell, 2014). My observations during this study came from attending and participating with the cadets during their physical training (PT) sessions in the morning hours. Secondly, they

came from attending the leadership laboratory training exercises where cadets conducted hands on training tasks at a local mountain reservation. I attended four PT sessions and two leadership labs. During the observation period, I followed my observation protocol, which included journaling my observations including descriptions of the physical setting, accounts of particular events, and personal reflective notes (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) recommended spending prolonged time in the field. This allowed me to bolster an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study gathering additional detail about the site and people while providing credibility to the study.

Document Review

The last source of data collection came from collecting qualitative documents. The review of documentation aided to complement the contextual information I received in the interviews. According to Creswell (2014), documents enable the researcher to obtain the language and words of participants, represents data to which the participants have given attention, and serves as an unobtrusive source of information to the researcher. In this study, the documents I collected and reviewed included the course syllabus, leadership evaluation card (i.e., blue cards), and the cadet command leadership evaluation guide.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the use of multiple methods, sources, or perspectives in qualitative research. Triangulation of data is important for the trustworthiness of the study. Trustworthiness in qualitative research includes credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation provides a more comprehensive understanding versus a single approach, increases the level of knowledge,

and strengthens the researchers' perspectives about the subject phenomena (Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), triangulation of the data sources increases validity, reduces bias, addresses complexity, and enhances rigor. Increased validity helps confirm or disconfirm findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). Multiple sources can reduce the impact of individual bias on results and ensure findings are not skewed by one perspective or method. Creswell (2014) suggested self-reflection by the researcher will provide an open and honest narrative and will allow comments by the researcher about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their personal backgrounds (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, triangulation helped address the complexity of the phenomenon to provide a more complete picture, enhance the rigor, and promote trust in the findings by showing how multiple methods were used to improve the results (Patton, 2015).

In this study, triangulation occurred between multiple data points, which helped to justify the study. First, I used triangulation between the participants' description of their leadership development in the program in the classroom, during PT sessions, and leadership labs during the interviews and what is observed during my attendance at both the PT sessions and leadership labs. I watched to see if the ROTC instructors were leading the training or if the cadets were planning, organizing, executing, and critiquing the training. In student-centered learning, the student is guiding the learning process with the teacher on the side to serve as a guide and make course corrections. Secondly, I triangulated between how the participants described their leadership experiences in relation to the leadership attributes and competencies in comparison to the document review of the ROTC Blue Card evaluations and the ALRM. Lastly, I triangulated the

responses from the interview questions regarding peer leadership with observations during both the PT sessions and leadership labs. Generation Z students prefer working in collaborative environments, and therefore, I looked for correlations between how the cadets described their interactions and what I saw at the PT sessions and leadership labs.

Bracketing

Ahern (1999) explained bracketing is a process used in qualitative research to mitigate bias, preconceptions, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon. Alase (2017) stated during phenomenological research, the only time the researcher should bracket or keep his/her preconception out of the process is during interviews of participants and collection of research data. According to Smith at al. (2009), bracketing one's preconception during interviews enables participants to express their concerns and make their claims on their own terms. Bracketing was integral in this study for me due to my prior experiences as an Army ROTC cadet and serving as in instructor with the Army ROTC program. As Van Maanen (2014) commented, "bracketing describes the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world to study the essential structures of the world. Stepping outside of oneself (p. 188). I provided for the richness of the cadets' responses to guide the analysis process.

Data Analysis

There is no one preferred method of coding when conducting interpretive phenomenological analysis; however, several are commonly used such as thematic analysis, content analysis, and framework analysis (Alase, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2014). I followed the guidelines from Creswell (2014), in which he highlighted six steps in data analysis in qualitative research. The first step was to organize and

prepare the data for analysis. This involved transcribing the interviews and arranging the data into different types. Second was to read and review all the data to gather a general understanding of the ideas of the participants. The third step was to start coding all the data (Creswell, 2014). Saldana (2016) noted that coding involves identifying patterns and themes in the data and interpreting the meaning behind the themes.

Following the semistructured interviews, I coded all the interviews using first and second cycle coding methods described by Saldana (2016). I used Dedoose, which is a cloud-based software system that allowed me to import each transcript and other relevant documents and then select text for coding. Dedoose provided the capability to link transcript data with the demographic information of each participant, such as their race, age range, gender, initiative, and role. My initial set of coding followed Saldana's first cycle elemental method using descriptive coding. During this first review of the transcription data, I took note to observe for descriptive language around the six leadership attributes or competencies. Following this review, I followed Saldana's (2016) second cycle coding method called pattern coding. Pattern coding is a method to group the summary from the descriptive coding into smaller numbers of categories, themes and concepts to gain more breath into the analysis (Saldana, 2016).

The fourth step in the data analysis process from Creswell (2014) involved using the coding process to generate a descriptive understanding of the people, setting, and categories or themes for analysis. These themes were later found as major findings and reported later in the findings section of the study. The fifth step was to advance the description and themes through a narrative passage with a chronology of the events and discussion of those themes. The sixth and final step was to provide an interpretation of

the findings or results. This interpretation can either be derived from the researcher's personal interpretation or from comparison of findings from the literature and theories.

Alase (2017) explained the key purpose of the transcription, coding and analysis is to represent the "core essence" of the "lived experiences" of the research participants without distorting or misrepresenting the "core essence" of what the participants have experienced (p. 15). I used interpretive phenomenological analysis because I wanted to understand how the respondent made the decisions or actions they took during the selected activities and tried to experience it from that person's perspective.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers must be aware of how their own biases, values, and personal background might affect their research (Creswell, 2014). Minimizing potential bias is important as the researcher. My role served as both an observer and as a participant observer. I served as a participant observer with the cadets during their PT sessions that typically included both strength training and a run. In this study, I had prior experience with the Army ROTC program. I participated as an Army ROTC cadet 33 years ago and as an Army ROTC program instructor in the past 16 years. Although I possessed knowledge of the program and processes, I did not have any knowledge or relationships with anyone currently participating in the program. Additional challenges could be observed in my positionality in the United States Army. At the time of this research, I served in the rank of colonel, which is a senior rank in the military and would be the highest-ranking officer visiting the Army ROTC program. To address this concern, I wore civilian attire and did not wear any uniform that identified my rank. To address

potential bias, I focused on demonstrating openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness during interactions with the cadets (Patton, 2015).

Ethical Assurances

Protecting the right and privacy of all participants is paramount in qualitative research. Alase (2017) stated participants in IPA research should feel comfortable and confident their rights and dignities will be protected without concern for sharing their personal experience. Further ethical considerations include protection of participant privacy, anonymity, and the importance of maintaining confidentiality (Patton, 2015). In this study, I followed the ethical considerations as mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Rowan University and maintained the highest ethical standards in my research. I received written approval from the director of the Army ROTC program and submitted it to the IRB for final approval. All participants signed an informed consent, which the IRB approved. The informed consent included the purpose of the study, how confidentiality would be protected, and information about data protection. All collected data remained password protected on my personal laptop and was only shared with my committee chair as required. The participants were identified by pseudo naming convention to protect their privacy.

Conclusion

Students of Generation Z learn and interact differently from those of previous generations. Institutions of higher education are now challenged to implement new and effective strategies to address the challenges posed by the learning styles of the Generation Z students. Although numerous structured leadership programs are found in higher education institutions, evaluating leadership development can be measured in

numerous ways. This qualitative study focused on the cadets' description of their leadership experience. Secondly, this study focused on the development of durable leadership attributes and competencies in a student-centered experiential learning environment. Evaluating the development of leadership attributes and competencies in Army ROTC cadets ensures that future officers possess the essential qualities needed to lead effectively in the military. These attributes (e.g., integrity, accountability, adaptability) are critical for maintaining discipline, cohesion, and mission success in a unit. Additionally, the cadet responses can help identify areas for improvement, providing opportunities for instructors to tailor training and mentorship to each cadet's needs. This personalized approach can enhance the cadets' growth as leaders.

Additionally, evaluating leadership attributes and competencies can help maintain the high standards of ethical leadership expected in the military, reinforcing the Army values and principles that underpin the profession of arms. Finally, it can contribute to the overall readiness and effectiveness of the armed forces, as capable and well-rounded leaders are essential for national defense. Lastly, the study sought to understand how the cadets describe how peer leadership impacted their leadership development experience. This is essential because it offered valuable feedback on the effectiveness of peer-driven learning and camaraderie in the ROTC program. Their insights can help refine training methods and enhance the peer leadership model, ensuring it continues to foster strong leadership skills and teamwork. Additionally, this understanding promotes a culture of self-awareness and continuous improvement among cadets, better preparing them for future leadership roles in the military upon commissioning.

Chapter 4

Findings

The findings chapter is used to present and discuss the results of the research study. This is a critical part of the study, which allows me to showcase the data collected and analyzed during the research process. This chapter covers the participants, themes, and a summary. The focus is on understanding the participants' perspectives, experience, and interpretation of the research topic (Creswell, 2014). The overarching objective is to present a rich, in-depth exploration of the research topic and provide a comprehensive account of the study's outcomes in relation to the context of existing knowledge and theories.

Generation Z is the current generation of students studying at colleges and universities around the world. Student leadership development is crucial for Generation Z as they enter the workforce and military because it equips them with essential skills and attributes needed for effective leadership roles. Leadership development programs such as Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) foster qualities like teamwork, communication, problem solving, and adaptability, which are vital in both civilian and military settings. Moreover, they instill a sense of responsibility, ethics, and accountability, ensuring that the next generation of leaders can navigate the complex challenges of the modern world while upholding high standards of integrity and performance.

This qualitative study focused on addressing the research questions related to how participants describe their leader development experience, durable leadership attributes

and competencies to shape leader identity, and the influence of peer leadership on leadership development.

Results

Data were collected from all participants to gather their views and description of their leadership development experience throughout their 4 years in Army ROTC. The data were collected from participant interviews, observation of the cadets in training during labs and physical training, and through document review of the program syllabus, artifacts, and bulletin board information. During the interviews, participants provided introductory information on their childhood backgrounds and what led them to join the ROTC program. They answered questions related to their leadership development journey, how they learn in an academic environment, their acquisition of leadership attributes and competencies, and the influence of peer leadership on their development. The interviews were coded and recoded and synthesized into emergent themes. These themes remained consistent throughout the course of the interviews and the other data collection methods.

Theme Development

This section will provide a rich description of the emergent themes from the data collection process. The themes were gathered though cadet interviews, observations, and document reviews. These themes were the focal point for the cadets' leadership experience during ROTC. Table 2 highlights the three themes that emerged including leadership for student learning, effective leadership development, and team leadership.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Leadership for Student Learning	Flip the Switch
	Lead by Example
	Confidence in Abilities
Effective Leadership Development	Adaptive Leadership
	Overcoming Obstacles Through Resilience
	Emotional Intelligence
Team Leadership	Pair Leadership
	Guidance and Mentoring

Theme 1: Leadership for Student Learning

Leadership for student learning for ROTC cadets signifies a multifaceted approach to developing the knowledge, skills, and attributes as they transition from precollege experiences to higher education to develop the skills necessary to excel as future military leaders. It involves a commitment to continuous learning, where cadets not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also engage in practical training that simulates real-world military scenarios. It emphasizes the importance of effective leadership, communication, and decision-making skills, which continuously builds the cadets' confidence in their abilities and actions. Moreover, it fosters opportunities where experienced military personnel and MS III and MS IV level cadets guide and inspire less experienced cadets, sharing their wisdom and experiences to shape the next generation of leaders. Mezirow (1994) said this learning is the process of appropriating a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's life experiences that shape us in a new way,

which others can recognize. Ultimately, leadership for student learning in ROTC combines education, practical application, and mentorship to prepare cadets to meet the challenges of commissioning as officers through the ROTC program.

The theme of Leadership for Student Learning encompasses several subthemes that shape the cadets' initial transition from their experiences in high school to learning and participation in Army ROTC and eventual development into effective military leaders, which include Flipping the Switch, Lead by Example, and Confidence in Abilities.

Flipping the Switch. This subtheme signifies the moment when cadets embrace their responsibility as leaders. In ROTC, this occurs when they recognize their duty to a higher calling to lead others, face challenges, find problem solving solutions, and overcome obstacles. It is the turning point when they understand that leadership is not just a title but a commitment to the wellbeing and success of their unit and comrades. It involves accepting challenges, taking initiative, and being accountable for their actions. Mezirow (2007) associated this turning point as a form of transformational learning where students move from their current meaning structure, for which evidence is provided to support one's initial bias to establishing new meaning structures or points of view. They reflect upon their assumptions and move to change their habits to incorporate a new thought process to understand the experience.

The subtheme Flip the Switch holds great significance for new ROTC cadets as it represents a transformative moment in their journey toward becoming future military leaders. It signifies the critical transition from civilian life or basic military training into the mindset of a leader and an officer candidate. For new cadets, flipping the switch

means fully embracing the responsibilities and expectations that come with their role. It involves recognizing that they are no longer just individuals but part of a larger team with a mission to fulfill. It entails accepting the challenges of leadership, adapting to a disciplined lifestyle, and committing to the values and standards of the military. This switch-flipping moment instills a sense of duty, drive to accomplish the mission, accountability to self and team, and a willingness to serve others and the nation. Ultimately, Flip the Switch symbolizes the cadet's commitment to their personal and professional growth, embracing the transformation from a civilian into a future leader who is prepared to accept the challenges, responsibilities, and rewards of a military career.

I was able to observe cadet Bravo serving as an MS IV this year during the combined field training exercise (CFTX) and watch him share his experiences with the younger cadets in a one-on-one environment watching both his confidence and his ability to reassure the younger cadets. Cadet Bravo explained, "ROTC provided me opportunities to grow as a leader which I didn't have while serving on executive board positions with clubs on campus which I don't see them as not real leadership positions." He continued, "ROTC put me in a lot of unique leadership type positions that the other clubs did not provide which allowed me to develop new skills." He concluded, "I haven't really had a chance to develop others or work with subordinates until these opportunities in ROTC and now is my responsibility to train and help others in our battalion succeed."

Cadet Charlie shared a personal growth and learning moment even when faced with tough circumstances. In ROTC, one of the biggest challenges younger cadets experience is speaking up and taking charge of a group of people. Cadet Charlie stated,

"You have to learn to assert yourself into the situation and demonstrate that you are in charge. Public speaking especially for a generation that is comfortable being autonomous is a challenge." Cadet Charlie explained "During my MS II year when I was put in charge of some smaller sized leadership positions, I often struggled and was told when in charge, take charge." She said, "I view myself as an introverted person my entire life and believe that was my largest challenge . . . I understood I had to rebound from these speaking struggles and was determined to be viewed as someone in charge." Cadet Charlie explained how she learned to take charge in this area, stating:

> Over the time I have learned that there is a time and place to be able to flip that switch from being a quiet person not talking much to someone people seek for guidance. I was guided by my battalion commander when I attended CTLT that when it comes time to lead that you have to lead. There's nothing wrong with being an introvert. It is only an issue if you are an introvert in a situation where you should not be introverted. Now I have improved in flipping that switch.

Cadet Delta shared an example that he believes he can mentally flip the switch and go into a mental autopilot to problem solve and address personal adversity, which he believes can influence the team's approach to challenges. He said, "I prefer the idea of treating obstacles as solvable puzzles and believe the method in which I addresses problem-solving can create a can-do culture within my platoon." He claimed, "I believe my personal drive which I developed over the course of my ROTC training motivated me to push through challenges in order to improve." He provided the following example of his mindset, explaining:

> During advanced camp, we were on a 12-mile ruck. I messed up my foot pretty bad around mile seven. I was like this is going to be terrible and it was. I laced up my boot very strongly until it felt numb, and I said I'm going to get through this, I don't care. I don't know how to describe it but there is this shift that occurs in your brain when you are in something terrible for a long time and your brain just shuts off. Your body goes into autopilot. I never experienced anything like that until I got into ROTC and I thought this is awesome! I am so glad I had that experience because even now if I'm doing something physically or mentally difficult, that experience from camp which puts me into auto-drive. I love it so much.

Cadet Golf shared how he changed his views on the role of a leader through his experience in ROTC and his accountability to developing others. Cadet Golf mentioned, "Being a leader is more about caring for the people they are leading and that a good leader works for their team, not the other way around." He said, "Now I look to see what my team needs in order to be ready and look good and not about me looking good."

Cadet Golf shared how he now embraces his role as a leader and feels a personal accountability to his subordinates. Cadet Golf provided an example regarding physical fitness in which he was motivated by personal pride to move himself from an average level of physical fitness to someone the younger cadets would admire, stating:

> I'm just thinking myself if I am out of breath while doing fitness training with the MS I, II, and IIIs and they see me and I can't keep up with them, then what would that make them think? Here is this person who is supposed to be the example and if they're unable to set the standard, then what do we expect of them to ask them

to do something we can't do ourselves? I believe having them drive to want to improve to want to know my stuff to and to want to have that level of fitness, that's something that I do feel now as a more confident leader, and I certainly would not have felt in the past.

Lead by Example. This subtheme is a fundamental principle in the military, where actions speak louder than words. Cadets must demonstrate the values, standards, and behaviors expected of leaders. By embodying these qualities, they inspire trust and respect among their peers and set the bar for the entire unit. Leading by example means adhering to the highest ethical and professional standards, which fosters a culture of discipline and integrity in the ROTC program. According to Posner (2015), after establishing a common set of values in an organization, leaders must follow through on these values. Leaders must uphold principles and standards through their actions. When leaders demonstrate a deep commitment to shared values, they can build a strong relationship with their followers based on trust.

The phrase "what's the standard" or "lead by example" is ingrained in the cadets' language as early as the MS I year. It is simplistic to explain and understand for every cadet in the program. The ROTC cadre shared the example with the cadets that the presence of them wearing the military uniform both on and off campus sets them apart and remind them they must set the example at all times because they represent everyone in the military. When the leader models standards, it builds trust and credibility, and establishes a benchmark for the team's behavior and work ethic. Modeling expected standards enables the cadets or leader in general to model the behavior they expect from their team. This becomes an expectation for leaders at all levels of command.

Cadet Alpha spoke to the point of setting the tone in the cadet battalion. Typically, in an ROTC battalion, particularly smaller sized ROTC programs, the cadets generally can identify who are the stronger, higher performing cadets. Physical fitness is one of those metrics that are objective in nature with an identified score associated with physical fitness performance. Cadet Alpha explained how he struggled his first 3 years in ROTC with physical fitness and made an effort to set the tone during his MS IV year, stating:

> When I arrived here during my MS I year I could not run well and by my senior year I was able to run with both the A and B groups during runs and this was a significant improvement. I found the same improvement in training for the dead lift events. I know the younger cadets saw this and I was able to inspire them and have more credibility with them.

Cadet Delta was very clear when he explained how modeling the standard was the most important competency that he developed and valued. He said, "You, in my opinion, cannot be a leader until you're leading by example . . . you're practicing what you preach . . . if you're a hypocrite, nobody's gonna take you seriously." Leading by example emphasizes the authentic nature of leadership in which a leader must accept the responsibility of both the successes and failures of their teams. In learning that lesson from his professor of military science, he said, "I would apply it when I interacted with the junior cadets and wanted to demonstrate through my example how leaders should compose themselves." He continued, stating:

> Back in the day, I would blame other people. I'd say oh this is somebody else fault. The PMS taught me that you will always be rewarded for what your

subordinates do good for you as a leader. As a leader you have to be willing to give all the credit and take all the blame.

Cadet Foxtrot not only displayed personal growth in character and attitude, but she made a personal commitment to improve physically. When she started the ROTC program as a freshman, the cadre conducted a physical fitness test of 1 minute of pushups, 1 minute of sit ups, and a one-mile run. She explained how she was so embarrassed because she could not even complete the run. She explained she was determined to turn it around and improve and set the example, stating:

> I felt I wanted to be that female leader example for other upcoming classes that they can refer to for physical fitness. So I made my own plans and work out plans and nutrition plans. I'm going to do this. At the time I was working a lot and had a heavy class load so I had to be super disciplined in the sense of my priorities of getting class work done and also make the time to physically develop myself for ROTC. Now I score very well on the ACFT.

She not only scored well, but she also scored the highest score in the battalion. Additionally, her commitment to lead by example for all the cadets, specifically the other female cadets, displayed significant growth from her initial lack of confidence and leadership experience. For someone who participated in the high school band with no athletic or sporting background, this was a significant growth achievement.

Confidence in Abilities. This subtheme is a cornerstone of effective leadership. It serves as the roots for effective communication, decision making, resilience, initiative, and motivation. As cadets develop their skills and knowledge, they gain the self-assuredness needed to make decisions under pressure and lead with conviction. It instills

trust and credibility, reassuring their peers, subordinates, and superiors that they are capable of leading effectively. Confidence is not about arrogance but about a deep belief in one's abilities and a willingness to take calculated risks. It enables cadets to communicate effectively, inspire their teams, and navigate challenges with poise. Martin and Phillips (2017) defined confidence as the belief in one's capability to be successful in completing tasks, achieving goals, and judging one's effectiveness. Confidence also involves having positive self-views regarding one's own knowledge, skills, and abilities in such a way that simulates their behavior and prompts them to act.

Developing trust and credibility in Army ROTC is essential for instilling confidence in leadership. It means consistently demonstrating integrity, competence, and reliability. Cadets must uphold their commitments, follow through on responsibilities, and make sound decisions that align with the values of the military. By doing so, they earn the trust of their peers and superiors, which is crucial for effective teamwork and command. Trust is the foundation upon which confidence is built; when cadets are seen as trustworthy and credible, their actions inspire confidence in their leadership abilities. Trust is a two-way street that includes trust and confidence by the leader in relation to their team and trust and confidence in the team in relation to the leader. This confidence is vital in military settings, as it ensures that subordinates are willing to follow orders and work together with faith in their leaders' judgment and capabilities.

Cadet Alpha validated this point, stating:

> The reason why I think confidence is important is because even if you are wrong, you always sound right as long as you sound confident because people will believe you. People look up to the confident one because that person knows how

> to make a decision versus the person which does not and is confusing everything and doesn't make a decision at all.

He emphasized, "Even if a leader makes a wrong decision, displaying confidence can still inspire trust and followership." Confident leaders are perceived as more decisive and capable, encouraging others to look up to them and trust their judgment. He concluded, "If a leader appears confident in their decisions, it motivates others to believe in the path we're taking."

Cadet Echo was able to draw a parallel between his sports background and the ROTC experience, emphasizing how confidence is essential not only for oneself but also for instilling it in his subordinates, explaining:

> Playing sports you have confidence in your abilities, but if you have a bad day, it can shake your confidence. The same thing in ROTC you have to trust yourself if you want your soldiers to be confident in everything they do so you as the leader must be confident.

He acknowledged, "The leader's belief in their abilities and attitude go a long way in inspiring and reassuring his soldiers and will contribute to their overall morale and performance."

Cadet Bravo acknowledged the broader influence of a leader's confidence in communicating with others on the team's overall attitude and commitment, stating:

> Confidence is crucial because it's not just about how the leader feels; it's about how their confidence affects the entire team's morale. When a leader speaks with confidence and is sure of their direction, it reduces uncertainty and creates a more focused and determined atmosphere.

Cadet Golf shared, “During high school I was very shy and didn’t believe in myself; however, going through the ROTC program, studying and working hard, I developed a solid baseline competency and high level of tactical proficiency.” This allowed him to address his peers and subordinates in a confident manner. He said, “Confidence is crucial in a leader because if you don’t believe in yourself, no one else will.”

The cadets’ confidence through communication was evident to observe during the physical training sessions I attended and during the CFTX where the MS IVs spoke with authority and confidence. During the physical training session, I observed cadet Charlie encouraging the junior cadets to push themselves and not give up during a grueling kettle bell, pushups, and run challenge. She confidently motivated the junior cadets saying, “push hard, don’t quit, you will need this drive and endurance when you are completing 14 hours of STX lanes during camp.” I observed cadet Foxtrot take charge during the CFTX directing the “2 Minute Drill” in the Tactical Operations Center. She spoke with authority as she directed her orders. That same level of confidence and authoritative voice was reciprocated by cadet Bravo when he briefed the personnel numbers to the cadet battalion commander. Effective, confident communication enabled the cadets to convey goals, expectations, and information clearly, fostering cohesive and informed teams.

Theme 2: Effective Leadership Development

Effective Leadership Development in ROTC is a structured and rigorous process focused on preparing cadets to become capable and ethical military leaders. It encompasses a range of activities and training modules designed to instill the skills, values, attributes, and competencies necessary for success in the armed forces. In ROTC,

effective leadership development includes classroom education, hands-on training exercises, leadership opportunities, and mentorship from experienced military personnel. Cadets learn not only the fundamentals of military tactics, strategies, and ethics but also the practical application of leadership principles in dynamic and challenging scenarios. Moreover, leadership development in ROTC encourages cadets to foster a culture of discipline, teamwork, and accountability in their units. Kouzes and Posner (2007) believed effective leadership comes not from a hero or a heroine in a myth, but from ordinary people who possessed a strong sense of purpose and a willingness to express that purpose . . . they find solutions to overcome hardships.

Effective leadership development for ROTC cadets revolves around three crucial subthemes of adaptive leadership, resilience, and emotional intelligence. These subthemes instill multiple leadership attributes and competencies, skills, mindset, and interpersonal abilities necessary for cadets to overcome obstacles through resilience and lead with adaptability and empathy, ensuring they become capable and well-rounded military leaders. Ultimately, it prepares them to face the unique challenges and responsibilities of military leadership.

Adaptive Leadership. In ROTC, adaptive leadership is about equipping cadets with the ability to navigate the ever-changing and often unpredictable challenges of the military environment. It emphasizes the importance of flexibility, mental agility, critical thinking, judgement and innovation. Cadets learn to assess situations, make quick decisions, and adjust their plans as circumstances evolve. They are exposed to diverse training scenarios that simulate real-world military operations, challenging them to adapt and lead effectively under pressure. Adaptive leadership also encourages cadets to value

input from team members and adapt their leadership style to suit the situation and the strengths and weaknesses of their team.

Adaptive leadership refers to the ability to adjust and thrive in rapidly changing situations, crucial in the unpredictable field environment while seizing the initiative to take proactive steps to achieve objectives and solve problems without constant supervision, demonstrating leadership potential. These qualities are developed to prepare future officers to lead effectively in diverse and dynamic military environments, ensuring mission success and unit cohesion (ADP, 2019).

I had the opportunity to observe the cadet interactions during multiple physical training sessions, leadership labs and during the CFTX. The CFTX is a training event that occurs during the spring semester in which multiple ROTC programs in a certain geographical region will join together to train the cadets preparing for the cadet summer training (CST). The CFTX creates an intense leadership experience in a condensed period. The ROTC programs create multiple platoons and squads mixing cadets from each participating program so they are uncommon with each other. This CFTX structure forces the cadets to assimilate quickly with one another exactly like they will experience at CST. The primary focus of the training is to prepare the MS III cohort; however, there was an equally important training effect for the MS IVs who I was observing. During this event, the MS IVs were challenged to adapt with each other to create a functioning staff to oversee the entire training event. This includes command and control, administration, operations, logistics, and communication. The CFTX provided the setting for me to observe the subtheme of Adaptive Leadership.

At the start of the CFTX event, I observed cadet Foxtrot, who was serving as the cadet battalion commander, direct the new staff to implement the "2 Minute Drill" in the Tactical Operations Center (TOC). She explained:

> The 2 Minute Drill is something we adapted to use as a combined team among the three school staffs to share information. How it operates is I have the executive officer conduct this throughout the day in the TOC in which each staff section, admin, operations, logistics and comms all provide everyone in the TOC a brief update on their section to ensure we are all on the same sheet of music. There are no slides. Everyone stands by their area and report. Once we are complete, I have everyone continue doing what they are doing. Often, I do it on the hour but can direct it whenever I feel it is necessary. It is super helpful! Every school conducts their staff meetings differently, but we adapted to this method for ease of operations.

Cadet Bravo explained, "I link adaptability with emphasis on maintaining composure, making informed decisions and sound judgement, and providing reassurance." His interpretation highlighted the importance of a leader's steadiness in times of change. He further stated, "A leader should be able to adapt to changes and keep the team focused during turbulent times."

Cadet Charlie acknowledged, "I need to be able to adapt my leadership style to suit others' needs." She was offered the opportunity to participation in cadet troop leader training (CTLT) after the completion of CST. CTLT provides cadets the opportunity to experience leadership in an Army active-duty unit over a 3-to-4-week period. Cadets serve alongside active-duty lieutenants to gain firsthand knowledge and experience.

Cadet Charlie stated “CTLT exposed me to working with individuals of different ages and backgrounds which contributed to my ability to adapt and collaborate effectively…” During this experience with the active-duty soldiers, I learned to adapt my thinking and approach to more of a listening role than directive as the discussions were real world which is new to me versus ROTC campus based which I am most familiar.”

Cadet Delta explained, “The rewarding aspects of being in ROTC comes from the sense of accomplishment and growth as you progress through the program.” He shared, “I was proud of how I learned to personally prepare myself yet remain adaptable to expect the unexpected.” He described a situation that happened during CST where he was a squad leader conducting a tactics lane for a squad ambush, sharing:

> In camp I was given an ambush lane and there was gonna be a resupply on the road and they didn’t give me the direction the enemy was coming from. In our training you have to have the support by fire on one side and the assaulting element on the other side. I ended up modifying my squads set up to make it work. I thought I had prepared myself but I did something outside the traditional methods. I could not be rigid in my thinking and had to adapt what I knew on the to execute the mission successfully. I learned preparing yourself is important and it can work, but a lot of the times you just have to go with it and change on the fly. You get what you are given and you adapt. You have to be flexible, agile in your thinking and adaptable.

Overcoming Obstacles Through Resilience. Resilience is paramount in leadership development as it prepares individuals to navigate challenges and setbacks with determination and focus. Leaders often face obstacles that can derail progress, but

resilience empowers them to bounce back, learn from failures, and maintain focus on their goals. A growth mindset is necessary, enabling leaders to inspire and guide their teams through adversity. Resilient leaders are determined, mentally agile, persevere, and are problem solvers learning from their mistakes. They instill confidence in their followers, and reinforce the notion that setbacks are steppingstones toward growth and success. In ROTC, the structure remains similar from year to year, but the challenges to the cadets remain ever changing because the entire cadet chain of command rotates from year to year, which brings in new ideas, approaches, and directions to address similar problems. Cadets must learn to become resilient with a level of uncertainty from year to year. It involves building mental toughness, developing coping strategies, and learning to maintain composure under stress. Lastly, resilience extends to team dynamics, where cadets support each other, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

Cadet Charlie viewed resilience as a form of perseverance and determination. She stated, “The leader’s role in fostering unity and confidence through a resilient attitude can have a positive impact on team morale and motivation.” She said, “I believe resilience is about perseverance and not giving up, even when faced with tough circumstances.”

Cadet Foxtrot reflected on her experience of facing adversity and how she persevered and developed resilience as a leader. She recounted, “There was a moment when I considered quitting ROTC due to challenges and self-doubt. . . . However, my determination to overcome these challenges prevailed as I made a conscious decision to confront my struggles head-on.” Her ability to bounce back from such a moment of doubt exemplifies her resilience. She explained her very first tactics lane, stating:

> I remember the first time that I ran a lane. I was a platoon leader for a lane during my MS II year and as I said I was in nursing before, so I was never able to attend the ROTC class. They called my name to run the lane and I froze. I was like I have no idea what I'm doing. It was at that time with that class that was not supportive and not really nice at all. So I think it was just a movement to contact lane and I made eye contact and I just froze. I was just like I don't know what to do, I didn't know where to go and they're screaming at me. I mean I was almost in tears. I thought this is not fair. Why would they put me in a position to fail. We had an AAR after and they listed every single thing that I did wrong. There is nothing good that I did, but then I remember going home and thinking I'm going to quit ROTC. This is not for me. I was just telling myself so much, but then I said this is not going to happen to me again. I would go to study in the library. I would study videos on You Tube on the topics to get better. By the time I got to CST, I felt extremely confident and knew I was going to do well. I learned from my set back as an MS II and I moved forward.

Cadet Foxtrot took a great deal of pride in reflecting on her resilient mindset where she was to how far she has grown in the past 4 years in the ROTC program. For her and other cadets, personal pride was significant in their leader development experience particularly with the attribute of resilience. She stated:

> Resilience definitely is an attribute that I learned, and I think it's super important. You have to take hits, but you have to stick with it. Sometimes you are not in a position to show how much it affected you, but you can show how much it's changed you.

Cadet Hotel was the most intriguing—grateful and driven to pursue his personal goals of all the cadets interviewed. He was 1 year older than the other cadets and was pursuing a 5-year master's degree. The best words to describe cadet Hotel are persistent, determined, and resilient. He shared, "Early in my ROTC experience, I was faced with the fact that my scholarship was going to be canceled, and I was going to have to leave the program because of a medical diagnosis." Through his own efforts, he learned how to interpret and synthesize the military medical regulations to provide the correct interpretation of his issues, which ultimately were resolved in his favor. Cadet Hotel reflected on his journey of resilience through perseverance and determination, stating:

> It has been a pretty crazy and difficult road for me, but I also wouldn't trade it for anything. It made me a stronger person and also, at times where I had the opportunity to decide not to continue, I looked inward, and I realized this was what I was going to do. I would say a couple of times that I am going to pursue until I get kicked out of the program. Actually, I did get kicked out of the program. I came back and said that they would have to remove me from the building before I gave up on it, and I eventually got it all figured out. It took a lot of work, but it worked out.

Cadet Hotel shared an additional example in which he reflected on his growth in handling disappointments, setbacks, and stress, explaining how he developed the ability to remain calm under pressure, and bounce back from adversity. He shared, "Resiliency is probably the attribute where I grew the most during ROTC and is most likely the first word the cadre would use to describe me." Cadet Hotel continued:

> My resiliency started as early as high school and into college because of personal issues at home with my father deploying overseas and other family relationship issues, I carried a lot of stress which impacted my learning and ultimately was going to keep me out of the ROTC program.

When his back was against the wall, he said he was determined to remain in the program, explaining:

> I began writing some letters and demonstrating that I was a great cadet in this program and they shouldn't let me go. Through persistence, I eventually had the opportunity to speak with somebody who was the commander for the brigade and I asked him, "Sir this has been my past so far and what can I do about this?" And it was fixed within about 6 hours my waiver came through, and I was able to contract. If I had not developed resilience over the years, I most likely would not have made it through the program.

Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence is a vital component of effective leadership in ROTC. Cadets learn to understand and manage their own emotions and those of their team members. They develop empathy, which allows them to relate to and connect with their peers, fostering trust and camaraderie. Emotional intelligence also helps cadets navigate conflicts, as they can address issues with tact and empathy. It enhances their communication skills, enabling them to convey their ideas and instructions effectively. Cadets with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to build strong, cohesive teams, as they can assess and respond to the emotional needs and dynamics in the group. Zeidner et al. (2016) described emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, express, comprehend, utilize, and regulate emotions to promote empathy, a

sense of well-being and personal growth. Salovey and Mayer (1990) believed emotional intelligence could help individuals generate positive moods, reflect happiness in constructive and adverse environments, and be associated with adaptive behaviors like problem solving.

The leadership trait of empathy stands out as a guiding principle. It can enhance the effectiveness for leaders in any capacity. When you relate with your team through shared hardships or shared fun, empathy improves communication by allowing leaders to connect with others on a deeper level (Autry, 2004). Leaders who share difficulty and hardship with their personnel can better tailor their messages to the needs and emotions of their subordinates, resulting in clearer communication and reduced misunderstandings. Empathy refers to the capacity to understand and connect with the emotions, experiences, and perspectives of fellow cadets and soldiers, fostering better teamwork and leadership. When leaders demonstrate that they genuinely care about the well-being and concerns of their subordinates, a positive environment is created where individuals feel valued by their leadership. This self-concern for subordinates, in turn, can increase unit morale, trust, and enables the leader to improve team dynamics. Empirical evidence demonstrates that when leader demonstrate characteristics such as empathy and caring, followers will form more positive perceptions of their leader and his or her effectiveness (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Ling et al., 2000). Lastly, understanding and empathetic leaders who understand the strengths and weaknesses of their teams are in a more effective position to develop others. They can make better decisions for their teams because they understand what stresses them and their personal challenges and can support improved conflict

resolution because the leader can better understand the underlying causes of disagreements and take steps to address the issues.

When cadets demonstrate empathy, they become attuned to the needs and concerns of their peers, offering assistance and encouragement when necessary. This empathetic approach not only strengthens interpersonal relationships but also enhances unit cohesion and morale. It creates an atmosphere where cadets feel valued, heard, and respected, contributing to their overall well-being and motivation. During the CFTX, I observed a heightened level of emotional intelligence among the cadets. At one point during the second day of the exercise, after an intense tactical briefing where the MS III cadets in leadership positions were being evaluated, there was one MS III cadet who was visibly struggling and getting frustrated. I observed cadet Bravo pull that cadet aside and encourage the younger cadet. Cadet Bravo shared:

> I told that cadet that I was feeling the same way last year, confused and unsure…you can do this, take it one step at a time and know we are here to guide you to make sure you are successful.

That small discussion positively changed the tone and emotion in the room. It appeared the cadet was able to recompose himself and move on with the mission. Cadet Bravo shared, "I knew exactly how he was feeling and wanted to reassure him."

Recognizing the significance of connecting with soldiers on a personal level is not just a sentiment but a cornerstone of effective leadership. Cadet Echo stated, "The ability to genuinely care for the well-being of subordinates enhances trust and mutual respect, fostering a supportive environment where soldiers feel valued." This personal connection resonated with cadet Foxtrot as well. She explained, "Understanding others during tough

times is instrumental in creating a positive atmosphere where soldiers can confide in their leader and seek guidance." Cadet Foxtrot shared how she would invest extra time at the end of leadership labs to speak with the younger female cadets who she saw struggling. She said, "I would have a small huddle after the lab ended just with the female cadets sometimes and remind them that I know what they are going through and provide them recommendations to improve." Cadet Bravo emphasized empathy improves team dynamics in gaining insights from others' viewpoints, stating, "I see empathy as the ability to step into someone else's shoes and see the world from their perspective. It helps in handling conflicts effectively and in boosting overall team morale." Cadet Bravo declared, "My ability to understand others' feelings really developed over time in ROTC as now I can understand the struggles of others such as during the CFTX and be able to insert myself into a situation and assist."

Cadet Alpha believed sharing difficult experiences meant connecting with other persons feelings and being an active listener. He explained:

> Empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others. . . . As a leader, being able to empathize helps in building strong relationships with team members. . . . It's about being a good listener and showing genuine care for the well-being of those you lead.

Theme 3: Team Leadership

Team Leadership is intricately related in ROTC as it contributes significantly to the development of cadets into effective military leaders. Team Leadership in ROTC involves cadets taking on various roles in their units, providing them with opportunities to practice and hone their leadership skills in a team setting. Cadets may lead drills, plan

and execute training exercises, and coordinate organizational activities. This experience helps the cadets develop critical leadership qualities, including communication, decision-making, and teamwork.

Student involvement in ROTC extends beyond the classroom and training field. Cadets actively engage in extracurricular activities, such as community service projects (e.g., supporting the local soup kitchen in Newark), leadership labs, and participation in ROTC-sponsored events. This involvement fosters a sense of camaraderie, teamwork, and community in the ROTC program. Moreover, student involvement often includes leadership roles in student-run cadet organizations such as the Ranger Challenge and Pershing Rifles teams, where cadets gain practical experience in planning and executing events, managing resources, and working collaboratively with their peers.

In essence, the experience gained through leading teams and actively participating in the ROTC community not only enhances Cadets' leadership skills, but also strengthens their commitment to the program and prepares them for the challenges and responsibilities of military leadership in the future. Team leadership builds teams and leads to a sense of belonging and helps individuals see themselves as integral parts of their organization (Sanders, 1992). The theme of Team Leadership encompasses two subthemes that shape the cadets collaborative learning environment, which include Pair Leadership and Mentoring.

Pair Leadership. Pair Leadership is a subtheme in ROTC that emphasizes the concept of shared leadership responsibility. Cadets often work in pairs or teams to lead and accomplish various tasks and missions. This approach instills the importance of collaboration and cooperation among cadets, teaching them to leverage each other's

strengths and expertise to achieve common goals. Dyer et al. (2007) concurred, noting effective team leadership is based on team members taking advantage of each other's skills, knowledge, and experiences. Each team member is expected to bring a certain level of contribution to the team. Pair leadership also emphasizes the need for communication and trust between leaders, as they must make decisions together, delegate responsibilities, and synchronize their efforts to ensure mission success. Cadets learned that effective leadership is not solely an individual endeavor but a collective effort that requires teamwork, shared accountability, and mutual support.

Team accountability is an important component of pair leadership and a well-functioning military unit. Cadets learn the importance of taking responsibility for their actions and decisions, which promotes trust among team members. Equally, senior level cadets felt a responsibility and accountability to the junior level cadets to training and develop them. When everyone is held accountable for their tasks and performance, the unit operates smoothly, and bonds of trust and mutual reliance are strengthened. This accountability is essential for mission success in the military, where teamwork is paramount.

Kouzes and Posner (1987) also found that effective leaders knew that they required partners to accomplish extraordinary things. They knew that they could not achieve their goals alone, and as such, they fostered collaboration, created cooperative goals, and searched for integrative solutions. Kouzes and Posner (1987) explained collaboration built trust between the leaders and followers because it made followers feel like owners because they regarded the organization's goals as their own.

Cadet Alpha emphasized the importance of training others as a leader. He said, "A leader should invest in their team's growth, empower them to take on responsibilities, and provide guidance…the goal is to make others better. It is not just about personal success." He explained, "I improved in this area and made it a point of emphasis when I was an MS IV."

Cadet Bravo's perspective highlighted the focus of a team's success as a result of pair leadership. He explained, "A leader must recognize and address the needs of every team member to ensure that everyone is adequately prepared and capable of contributing effectively." During training events, such as conducting a squad training lane where all nine to 11 members of the squad have an assigned duty for the mission to be executed successfully, everyone must do their part. Cadet Bravo shared, "You're only as strong as your weakest link, and as a leader, it's your duty to ensure that everyone is on the same page and capable of carrying out the mission."

Cadet Charlie provided the best definition of pair leadership when she simply defined it as "investing in each other's success." She continued, "In my current class, I feel a strong sense of mutual support and accountability to each other and believe that this camaraderie is rooted in a willingness to help one another and a shared commitment to growth." The bond with her peers enabled them to assist each other, filling gaps in understanding that might not be adequately addressed by the cadre, stating:

> I think my class has helped develop each other. We're not out for each other in anyway I think we all get along and we're all invested in each other's success. I don't think there is a single person in our class that is actively trying to make someone's life harder but maybe it's just in my mind but that way, but I think

being able to share that bond with your class and if someone needs help you being there to help them or someone who doesn't understand the concept help understand of the way that maybe the cadre cannot explain it to them. Just being able to level with them.

Guidance and Mentoring. Guidance and mentoring provide a platform for the transfer of knowledge and experience in the ROTC program. Cadets benefit from the wisdom of more senior members and experienced officers who offer guidance, share lessons learned, and serve as role models. This mentorship fosters a supportive environment where cadets can seek advice, develop their skills, and grow as leaders. It also reinforces the sense of belonging and camaraderie in the ROTC community, as cadets recognize they are part of a tradition of excellence. Through mentoring, cadets not only gain knowledge and skills but also benefit from the wisdom and mentorship of those who have walked the same path before them, ensuring a seamless transfer of leadership knowledge and values from one generation of cadets to the next.

Cadet Echo emphasized a personal sense of responsibility for the care and development of those subordinate to him. He expressed, "It is important [to] mentor others to help them discover their own identity. . . . Mentor others so that way they can find their own leadership traits and they can find their strengths and weaknesses." Cadet Echo demonstrated a commitment to the improvement of the overall organization when he made the mature statement, explaining:

> During my MS III and MS IV years as a junior and senior I learned that mentoring others was really important and now as a platoon leader that it was really important to engage with the lower-level classes and hey if they're talking

> to me to talk back. Show them that you are listening to what they have to say. If you see them around campus, then ask them how are you doing or what are you planning for this weekend? Are you ready for the FTX? Give them some guidance. If you look over this chapter, it may help you. Text me if you need anything and make sure you get some good rest because you may not sleep well during the patrol base. You want to stay hydrated before the ACFT.

Cadet Golf shared his experience as a teaching assistant and how he engaged with junior cadets, providing guidance and sharing his insights to help them improve. He explained, "By mentoring others, he aimed to leave a positive legacy and create a ripple effect of effective leadership among his peers." He explained in his past experiences, especially during high school, he really believed he had the opportunity to learn to impact others, stating:

> I didn't have those opportunities to really impact other people. I talked about how there's kind of this leadership role when I was in show choir. I was a senior and people look at the seniors as these role models to develop people, but at the same time that was my first year doing show choir and so I might've had a little bit of a role with that but for the most part I was being developed. It is not to say you cannot be developed and develop others at the same time, but ROTC certainly has, which I'll say is a big part of the culture, leaving behind these leaders or cadets who are going to be in this program past me once I commission, so now what kind of impression can I leave.

Cadet Bravo shared how the influence of fellow cadets played a significant role in his leadership development. He emphasized, "The impact of peer mentorship in the labs,

where more experienced MS IV cadets guided and instructed MS III cadets on tactics and procedures significantly improved everyone's learning." This peer-driven approach was crucial for their learning, enabling them to learn from the experiences of their peers, further stating:

> Peer mentorship is really prominent in the labs. As an MS III, we would have an MS IV run the labs and instruct us on how the labs were supposed to be run, and they would walk us through it before we would run them at full speed. They were very important for us and for the most part, all the tactics we learned were from our peers during the labs.

Cadet Bravo was particularly influenced by one of the MS IVs in the program. He shared, "There was a certain MS IV who took it upon himself to prepare me for Air Assault school which included scanning his Air Assault handbook, teaching me how to prepare my equipment and sharing his insights." He said, "This experience shaped me for when I became an MS IV to create a mentoring relationship with the younger cadets." He continued, stating:

> I would like to think my peer leadership impacted others. Since I am the cadet S1 this year, I didn't directly work with the MS IIIs as frequently; however, I would try to provide the younger cadets advice on what happened when I was in their situation and what to expect. My peer leadership is being able to add some guidance. I always provide time to field questions and to walk around and be present for the younger cadets.

Summary

This chapter presented a rich collection of firsthand experiences, observations, and opinions from eight ROTC cadets who participated in this leadership development study. Observations during physical training sessions and leadership labs in addition to document reviews of the course syllabus and PMS guiding principles provided a comprehensive analysis of the cadet experience. Throughout the analysis of the cadet narratives, several connected categories emerged, and subsequently, three themes captured the essence of the lived experiences of the ROTC cadets during their 4 years of participation in the ROTC leadership development program emerged. These themes included Leadership for Student Learning, Effective Leadership Development, and Team Leadership. These themes ultimately provided a greater insight into addressing the primary research study question of how Generation Z Army ROTC cadets describe and interpret their leadership development experience.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand how Generation Z Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) cadets describe and interpret their leadership development experience. This study used an interpretive phenomenological analysis, which is a qualitative approach with a constructivist worldview used to provide detailed examinations of lived personal experience of the ROTC cadets (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The Army ROTC cadets shared their experiences gained through time spent as both a leader and follower both on campus and during the cadet summer training (CST) after their junior year allowing the researcher to gather meaning to understand their leadership development in terms of the leadership attributes and competencies and peer leadership.

This chapter provides seven sections. The first section is a discussion and answer to the research questions. The next section revisits the conceptual framework in relation to the research findings. The third section provides my leadership reflection from completing this dissertation. The final four sections include delimitations and limitations, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Discussion and Answer to Research Questions

The research questions were developed to support the primary research question: How do Generation Z Army ROTC cadets describe and interpret their leadership development experience? During the study, eight Army ROTC MS IV cadets answered multiple questions regarding their experiences in ROTC, leadership attributes and competencies, and peer leadership. Research Question 1 (RQ 1): How do Army ROTC cadets describe their leadership development experience? The first research question was

designed to provide an active voice to the participant to share their lived experience during their participation as an ROTC cadet. The cadets answered multiple questions regarding their overall experience in the ROTC program. They answered questions describing their feelings they associate with their leadership development experience. Lastly, they addressed how ROTC contributed to their own leadership development. The overarching theme, which was consistent with each of the participants, was leadership for student learning. This theme effectively pointed toward the personal growth in multiple areas that they each found as they transitioned from high school through their MS IV year of Army ROTC. These growth areas included embracing a leader mindset through multiple experiences, leading by example, and confidence in their abilities.

First and foremost, the cadets viewed their leadership development experience as a time where they had a significant change in mindset and responsibility where they embrace their role as leaders. It signified the transition from civilian life as a high school student into the mindset of a leader, in essence, allowing them to "flip the switch," transitioning from where they are to where they are going. Cadets recognized their duty to lead, face challenges, find solutions, overcome obstacles, and develop others. This transitional change is consistent in the literature with the study from De Jong et al. (2016), which linked transformational leadership of managers new to their roles to improvement with attitudes, behaviors, and performance outcomes. Similarly, research by Bass and Riggio (2006) studied leaders new to their role who described a shift in their thinking and approach to leadership and learned to empower and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and develop their own leadership capacity. The cadets understood that leadership is not just a title but a commitment to the well-being and

success of their unit and comrades. This transformational process involved reflecting on their assumptions and adopting new thought processes to understand the experience. Cadets learned to accept challenges, take initiative, and be accountable for their actions. These hands-on experiential learning experiences provided opportunities for skill development but also enabled self-reflection and refinement of their leadership practices (Honig, 2004).

The cadets shared how their leadership development experience was shaped by the diverse experiences and demands of ROTC training through the student-centered experiential learning design of the program to include the physical training program, leadership labs, and CST. These programs provide cadets with opportunities to handle adversity and change effectively. These experiences not only aided them in learning, but equally important provided them a voice and input in conducting the training. Studies on student-centered experiential learning highlight the benefits of the diverse experiences for students that included increased autonomy, engagement, confidence, critical-thinking skills, and a more meaningful learning experience (Arif, 2021; Jones, 2007; Young & Paterson, 2007). Multiple cadets commented how they had participated in leadership positions in clubs during high school and even some leadership courses in college; however, none of them provided the stress and intensity they experienced, as the cadre would take them out of their comfort zone, put them in new positions with short notice, and make them adapt. Cadet Bravo commented:

> When I got to the CFTX, I was the only cadet from our school placed in a squad with no one else from our program, and I had to adapt to their SOPs . . . it was

> extremely challenging . . . my campus leadership experience helped me be ultra prepared for CST.

Moreover, the cadets described their leadership development experience as a new opportunity to transition their thinking to cultivate personal motivation and initiative from what they had experienced in high school. Cadet Echo shared:

> The ROTC structure enabled me to take initiative and be creative when I was serving in leadership positions as an MS III and MS IV to provide training to others to prepare them for success . . . the ROTC cadre were more as guides to us. . . they often let us make mistakes and learn to fail forward.

As the cadets learned and grew personally, they become more motivated to succeed and take initiative in various leadership roles. This drive to improve and excel fueled their leadership potential, as they actively sought opportunities to lead and make a positive impact. Cadet Foxtrot's example being motivated to succeed and taking personal initiative stood out during the interviews. She shared:

> I motivated myself from never playing any sports in high school and not being able to complete the one mile run during my initial fitness testing when I arrived to ROTC as an MS I to achieving the highest fitness score in the battalion as an MS IV.

Another critical aspect of personal growth that shaped their leadership development experience highlighted by the cadets was leading by example. The cadets learned to set an inspiring example for their peers by demonstrating a commitment to self-improvement and continuous learning. They motivated and encouraged others to follow suit, creating a positive environment for growth and development in the ROTC

program. Wren (2018) found leaders who set the example with increased commitment results in extra effort and increased productivity from employees.

Lead by example became a common phrase among the cadets. The cadets shared leading by example is the expectation of every cadet in the program. They explained how this competency is ingrained in every cadet from the first day of participation in ROTC. The cadets described how learning to lead by example shaped their leadership development experience as they developed personal pride in the fact that they are participating in something much larger than themselves, and they expect each other to uphold that standard. Additionally, they viewed leading by example as a stepping stone and leader requirement to develop others. Cadet Delta asserted, "Leaders must practice what they preach to earn the respect and trust of their team members." Leading by example involves embodying the values and behaviors expected from the team, setting a standard that others can aspire to follow. The cadets agreed that this authenticity and consistency in actions were essential building blocks for their leadership development experience and identity as a leader and definitely assisted in their ability to develop their subordinates.

Confidence in abilities was a significant component in how every cadet described their leadership development experience. Confidence was the strongest feeling the cadets associated with their leadership development experience. Confidence naturally stood out among the cadets as the ROTC program by nature of the program places cadets into positions and opportunities that are new to them and makes them uncomfortable. As the cadets complete their tasks and assignments, they begin to develop more confidence in their abilities. Cadet Alpha, who identified as an introverted individual, had commented

how he is much more confident speaking in front of people and providing briefings than he was when he started the program. Cadet Foxtrot stated, “I had to learn how to be comfortable when being uncomfortable.” The cadets shared as their confidence increased, so did their ability to develop trust among their peers with their abilities. Cadet Delta stated, “Sometimes you have to fake it and appear confident in order for people to think you know what you are talking about and get the mission going.” The cadets believed that displaying confidence in one’s actions and decisions inspires belief and trust among followers, leading them to have faith in the leader’s abilities. Lastly, they explained that maintaining composure and decisiveness in challenging situations is a demonstration of strong leadership, garnering respect, and admiration from subordinates.

Confidence enhanced the cadets leadership development experience in the areas of communication and interpersonal skills. As cadets evolved personally, they developed better communication abilities, enabling them to connect effectively with their peers and subordinates. Effective communication is vital for conveying goals, building relationships, and fostering a cohesive team. The literature supports this discussion as Marx (2019) pointed out in a study of health care leaders that a leader’s confidence with interpersonal skills can create a positive environment and a culture where the frontline healthcare staff would feel at ease and unafraid to speak up about errors. Therefore, leaders could improve a hospital’s safety, overall efficiency, and quality of care.

Lastly, the development of confidence over time strengthened cadets with problem-solving and decision-making skills, crucial for making sound judgments in complex and dynamic situations that leaders often encounter. As the cadets grew in confidence during their leadership development experiences, they earned the trust and

respect of their peers and superiors. This trust is vital for leadership and for building a strong and cohesive team.

Overall, the cadets' leadership development experience was identified as a transformative period of personal growth in which they assumed a new identity as a leader, they learned to lead by example, and in turn, continued to grow in confidence in multiple areas. In total, their leadership development experience served as a foundation for long-term leadership development. The skills and attributes the cadets acquired during their ROTC experience will continue to benefit them as they progress in their military careers and beyond.

Research Question 2 (RQ 2): Does the Army leadership development experiential learning model produce durable leadership attributes and competencies to shape leader identity in Generation Z Army ROTC cadets? The purpose of this research question was designed to gain perspective on their thoughts as they relate to leadership attributes and competencies. This question focused on self-reflection and student views on their individual identities as they practice leadership on campus and at CST. The cadets answered multiple questions regarding what they believe are key attributes and competencies of a leader and what leader attributes and competencies they see in themselves now, which they did not possess before their participation in ROTC. The overarching theme, which was consistent with each of the participants, was effective leadership development as they reflected on their leader identity as they transitioned from high school through their MS IV of Army ROTC.

Effective leadership development in ROTC is a holistic process that not only imparts knowledge and skills but also instills the values, ethics, and mindset necessary

for cadets to excel as leaders in the U.S. Army. It prepares them to face the challenges of military service. Effective leadership development is a comprehensive and multifaceted process designed to equip cadets with the skills, knowledge, and attributes and competencies necessary to become successful military leaders. It is rooted in a combination of education, practical training, mentorship, and experiential learning.

The interviews with the cadets afforded them the opportunity to engage in self-reflection, to gain a deeper understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses as leaders. This self-awareness allowed them to recognize their areas of expertise and areas needing improvement. The cadets were pleasantly impressed and humbled after member checking their responses to see the growth and development of their leader attributes and competencies. Effective leaders are those who understand themselves and can leverage their strengths while working on their weaknesses to become well-rounded and competent.

Effective leadership development for ROTC cadets revolved around three crucial subthemes: Adaptive Leadership, Overcoming Obstacles Through Resilience, and Emotional Intelligence. These subthemes instill the skills, mindset, and interpersonal abilities necessary for cadets to overcome obstacles through resilience and lead with adaptability and empathy, ensuring they become capable and well-rounded military leaders. These subthemes that provided the preponderance of the responses from the cadets confirmed the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ALRM) does produce durable leadership attributes and competencies in Generation Z Army ROTC students. These subthemes correlated to leadership attributes and competencies of mental agility, judgement, developing others, resilience, and empathy found in the ALRM.

In ROTC, adaptive leadership is a critical skill that cadets cultivated through experiential learning, training scenarios, and real-world experiences. It equips them to tackle the unpredictable challenges of military service and prepares them to excel as flexible, resilient, and effective leaders. The cadets provided rich examples that emphasized their ability to adjust and thrive in dynamic, challenging, and ever-changing environments. I found adaptive leadership was inclusive of numerous attributes and competencies described in the ALRM. The most durable for the cadets of these attributes and competencies included mental agility, judgement, and developing others. These were most notable from the cadets' experience in the areas of tactical decision making, leading diverse teams, and developing subordinates. Multiple cadets shared examples of themselves leading a small team during a simulated mission of a field training tactical exercise. As the exercise unfolded, unexpected challenges and obstacles arose, such as a change in weather conditions, equipment malfunction, or encountering an unexpected enemy presence. As adaptive leaders, they were able to assess the situation quickly, makes necessary adjustments to the mission plan, and communicate effectively with their team to ensure everyone understood and executed the new plan. They remained flexible, ready to change tactics, and applied sound judgement as needed while maintaining the overall mission's focus.

ROTC cadets often worked with peers from diverse backgrounds, each with unique strengths and weaknesses. As adaptive leaders, they recognized and leveraged these differences and created a cohesive and effective team. For example, they delegated tasks based on individual strengths, ensuring that the team's overall capabilities were maximized. Additionally, they promoted open communication, actively sought input

from team members, and fostered an environment where diverse perspectives were valued and integrated into decision-making processes. Heifetz et al. (2009) supported the concept of leveraging everyone on the team to support organizational success as they note, for the organization, the learning process should involve people at all levels, embrace differences in values and ideas, and bring together disparate groups, putting people "face-to-face with 'the other'" (p. 46).

As a mentor to develop other cadets, the ROTC cadets learned to adapt their leadership style to meet the needs and personalities of their mentees. Some cadets required more guidance and support, and others benefited from a more hands-off approach to encourage independence and problem solving. As an adaptive mentor, they learned to recognize these differences, tailored their guidance accordingly, and provided feedback and coaching that aligned with the individual development goals of each mentee. Again, the literature supports the points of recognizing individual differences and tailoring messages for individuals, as this learning may entail experimentation, mistakes, and discovery; moreover, it may include changes "in values, beliefs, or behavior," and it may necessitate emotional work (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p. 130).

Finally, the adaptable leadership of the cadets encouraged a mindset of lifelong learning. This commitment to learning ensures that leaders stay relevant, adaptable, and continuously improve their leadership abilities. This was evident with the cadets who had volunteered to participate in follow-on schools after CST, such as cadet Charlie attending cadet troop leader training. This training offered her the opportunity to practice her leadership training in a current military context with active-duty soldiers versus her training environment at ROTC with other cadets. The cadets pointed out that technology,

tactics, and challenges evolve rapidly; therefore, a commitment to continuous learning was crucial for them to maintain a competitive edge and effectively lead teams in ever-changing environments.

Another durable leadership attribute from the ALRM that shaped leader identity in Generation Z Army ROTC cadets was overcoming obstacles through resilience. Resilience was described by most of the cadets in examples how they "bounced back" from adversity and setbacks to overcome challenges. Cadet Charlie stated, "Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and failures, maintaining determination and a positive outlook." Resilient leaders inspire their teams to persevere through challenges and demonstrate that obstacles can be overcome with perseverance and adaptability. In the military and in organizations outside of the military, leaders are expected to navigate challenges and setbacks with determination and focus. Leaders often face obstacles that can derail progress, but resilience empowers them to bounce back, learn from failures, and maintain focus on their goals. As the cadets became more resilient as they gained experience in various leadership roles, they were better equipped to handle stress, conflicts, and challenging situations while maintaining composure and making rational decisions (Nafukho et al., 2016). Cadet Alpha stated, "I view resilience as turning setbacks into growth opportunities and believe the leader's behavior and attitude can inspire and motivate the team." He said, "Resilience is a crucial attribute for leaders because it's about staying strong and positive in the face of challenges…when the leader bounces back from adversity, it inspires everyone else to get better."

The final durable leadership attribute from the ALRM that shaped leader identity in Generation Z Army ROTC cadets was emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence

is crucial for fostering positive relationships with subordinates, peers, and superiors, leading to a more harmonious and effective leadership environment (Jain, 2018; Lemisiou, 2018). According to Lemisiou (2018), emotional intelligence encompasses a broad set of skills including self-awareness (i.e., understanding one's own emotions), self-regulation (i.e., managing one's emotions), social skills (i.e., interacting effectively with others), and motivation (i.e., using emotions to drive oneself toward goals). Jain (2018) explained empathy is a component of emotional intelligence and refers to the ability to recognize and understand the emotions and feelings of others. It involves being able to "put oneself in another person's shoes" and to perceive and respond to the emotional cues and needs of others (p. 158). Empathetic individuals can offer support, demonstrate understanding, and effectively communicate and connect with others on an emotional level.

Empathy was a very representative attribute of the cadets. Empathy allowed the cadets to connect with others on a deeper level and directly correlates with the behaviors of Generation Z students. Generation Z students seek opportunities to interact with their peers to learn in collaborative ways (Miller & Mills, 2019). Leaders who are empathetic can better tailor their messages to the needs and emotions of their subordinates, resulting in clearer communication and reduced misunderstandings. I experienced firsthand during the CFTX that when the cadets demonstrated that they genuinely cared about the well-being and concerns of their subordinates, it created a positive environment and enabled the leader to improve team dynamics. The cadets stressed the importance of leaders connecting with their team members on a personal level and understanding their feelings

and perspectives. The cadets concurred that empathetic leaders are more likely to earn the loyalty and commitment of their followers.

The cadets provided numerous examples demonstrating how their emotional intelligence empowered them to resolve conflicts, provide emotional support, communicate effectively, and foster team cohesion, ultimately contributing to their success as leaders in the ROTC. For example, the ROTC cadets demonstrated their emotional intelligence in building and maintaining team cohesion. They understood the emotional dynamics in the team and leveraged this understanding to boost motivation and morale. In another example, during the rigor of physical fitness training and during the frigid climates, training tactics in the winter months in preparation for their spring field training exercise (FTX) motivated them to push through despite the conditions. They recognized when team members needed encouragement or recognition and provided it accordingly. By fostering a positive emotional climate, these emotionally intelligent cadets inspired their teams to perform at their best, even in challenging situations.

Emotional intelligence plays a vital role in communication. Cadets with emotional intelligence can communicate clearly and adapt their communication style to suit their audience (Hojat, 2009). They know how to convey instructions, feedback, and information with sensitivity to the emotional state of their subordinates, peers, or superiors. For instance, when giving constructive feedback, they provide it in a constructive and empathetic manner, focusing on improvement rather than criticism. This approach enhances trust and ensures that their messages are well-received. Cadet Bravo validated the importance of transparency in communication. He suggested, “Leaders sharing both positive and negative information fosters a culture of trust and openness . . .

being approachable and understanding of your people encourages team members to participate in the discussions, leading to a more collaborative environment."

Overall, the Army leadership development experiential learning model produced numerous durable leadership attributes and competencies that shaped leader identity in Generation Z Army ROTC cadets. These leadership traits lay the groundwork for long-term leadership growth. These durable leadership attributes and competencies such as mental agility, judgement, developing others, resilience and empathy set a solid leader foundation as the cadets graduate to become commissioned officers in the Army.

Research Question 3 (RQ 3): How do Army ROTC cadets perceive peer leadership impacting their leadership development? This research question was designed to gain the ROTC cadets' perspective on their thoughts as they reflect on their personal experience serving as a peer leader how it influenced their leadership development and how their peer leadership impacted other ROTC cadets. The cadets answered multiple questions regarding how peer leadership during ROTC impacted their leadership development. Additionally, they were asked how their peer leadership impacted other cadets in ROTC and how their feedback was received by junior cadets. The overarching theme, which was consistent with each of the participants, was team leadership as they reflected on their interactions with both peers and mentors during their time in Army ROTC.

The powerful influence of peer leadership upon the development of cadets as effective leaders cannot be overstated and is consistent with the review of the literature for this study. The discussion with the cadets regarding peer leadership collectively was identified as team leadership and powerfully was supported under two subthemes of pair

leadership and guidance and mentorship. Pair leadership emphasizes the concept of shared leadership responsibility. The cadets viewed pair leadership impacting their leadership development in multiple ways to include as a form of collaboration, accountability and as a form of motivation.

First, the cadets viewed pair leadership as an important form of collaboration, which required communication and trust among peers to achieve success. The cadets described feelings of comfort and a natural setting for them to collaborate with peers, whether it was planning a physical training session or tactics lanes during a leadership laboratory. The collaboration enhanced the overall execution of the event or project. This was consistent with the literature, as Miller and Mills (2019) asserted that Generation Z students want opportunities to interact with their peers and to learn in collaborative ways, whether in class or while studying. Additionally, the cadets viewed paired leadership as a form of peer accountability, where their peers held them responsible for meeting standards and expectations, fostering a sense of mutual commitment to growth. They acknowledged pair leadership is shared support that moves beyond accountability, as peers offered help and feedback in areas where they needed to improve.

Previous studies supported these findings as they pointed out the importance of the peer-led networked learning community that not only contribute to individual capacity enhancement but also organizational development (Chen et al., 2020; Lester et al., 2017; Vaessen et al., 2014). The driving force behind this support is the shared goal of seeing each other succeed. They discussed how observing their peers' behavior, both positive and negative, through this paired leadership experiences provided valuable insights into leadership styles and behaviors they wanted to adopt or avoid.

Lastly, they viewed pair leadership as a form of motivation. Motivation included participation and interaction in classroom events, physical fitness training, leadership labs, field training exercises, and social events such as their annual dining-in. Pair leadership motivated the cadets to remain engaged in their learning experience. Fischer et al. (2019) supported this point and explained motivation is considered a key factor in learner success both individually and among peers. The association between learner motivation and the effectiveness of training programs are among the faster-growing areas of investigation in an adult education setting.

Regarding guidance and mentorship, peer leadership takes on a transformative role. Senior cadets offered a guiding hand, sharing their personal experiences and insights with their junior counterparts. The cadets viewed the guidance, which these mentors provided, as valuable wisdom gleaned from their own journeys, offering tips, strategies, and advice that junior cadets can apply to their own leadership development. This guidance served as a bridge between theoretical classroom teachings and real-world application, fostering well-rounded leaders who are well equipped to tackle challenges head on. The cadets participated in peer ratings through the use of blue cards for evaluations from their mentors, and they expressed a desire to receive their scores, revealing their commitment to self-improvement and their interest in evaluating their performance objectively. This cadet focus on self-performance is consistent with Worley (2011), who stated Generation Z students are committed to engage in self-evaluation of their learning. Their willingness to learn from setbacks and their determination to continue their leadership journey highlights their resilience and dedication to the overall mentorship process.

The cadets explained a significant value of their peer leadership was providing feedback and guidance to the less experienced cadets. They believed the feedback and guidance to junior cadets were generally well received, although some individuals may take time to speak freely. The cadets' peer leadership approach was grounded in understanding and empathy, fostering an environment conducive to growth and learning.

The cadets emphasized the camaraderie and mentorship that developed among peers over the years, as early as during the MS I year, where classmates supported and helped develop each other. They highlighted the significance of learning from experienced peers who join the program later, such as those with prior service, and how these individuals can excel in specific skills, like tactics. The examples given by the cadets helped to confirm theoretical concepts such as scaffolding by Vygotsky (1978).

However, they also note that traits like empathy and character are learned over time and not solely tied to prior experience. They emphasized the sense of unity and support, with peers willingly helping one another and sharing a bond that allows for effective collaboration (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017). Cadet Charlie suggested that mentorship is a defining aspect of peer leadership, where peers work together to understand concepts that might be challenging and provide support beyond what the cadre might offer (Cuseo, 2010).

Empathy and personal connection by their nature cut across the subtheme of emotional intelligence and mentorship as it formed an essential platform of effective peer leadership. Leaders who empathize with the challenges their peers face are better equipped to foster a positive leadership environment (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017). In the ROTC community, understanding the difficulties of others and extending a helping hand

creates a culture of compassion and shared commitment. The cadets viewed these personal connections as the accelerator to foster a sense of belonging, empowering cadets to push beyond their limits and embrace growth.

Lastly, the cadets viewed mentorship as a mechanism for transitioning into leadership roles in the battalion and beyond. Junior cadets looked up to their senior peers, recognizing them as role models who embodied the qualities of effective leaders. These role models inspired junior cadets to hone their skills, develop their character, and strive for excellence. By observing senior cadets take on leadership responsibilities, junior cadets gained valuable insights into the demands and rewards of leadership, motivating them to embrace their own leadership roles.

Leadership Reflection

As I reflect on this phenomenological study, I am following the advice given by Moustakas (1994). He explained the phenomenological researcher should offer a brief concluding commentary on the essence and inspiration of a completed phenomenological study. As I reflect on my quest to set the example as a lifelong learner, this phenomenological study proved to be a testament to my resilience and determination to achieve my goals.

As I embarked on the final leg of my 30-year journey in the United States Army, I found myself at a unique juncture in my life. My military career has been a remarkable odyssey, filled with challenges, triumphs, and, above all, a profound evolution as a leader. This reflection encapsulated not only the wisdom garnered from almost 3 decades of service but also my current 9-year endeavor of completing my doctoral degree with a phenomenological study on leadership development for ROTC students. This was special

to me because I began my experience with the military as an Army ROTC cadet where I earned my commission as an officer. This study was meaningful to me as it provided me the opportunity to learn more about the next generation of leaders and in doing so, learning how I can be the most effective in guiding and mentoring these young leaders.

My military journey commenced amid the Gulf War, and it was a transformative experience. Over the years, I had the privilege of serving in diverse roles, from air and missile defense to logistics to recruiting to name a few. I also spent a year in a combat zone instructing cadets in ROTC programs. This diversity of experiences afforded me a unique perspective on leadership, one that transcends the confines of any single role or context. Specifically, during the past 9 years in which I participated as a doctoral student, I learned academically what authentic leadership encompassed and realized I was demonstrating those attributes during my roles in the Army. In my journey, I encountered numerous instances of authentic leadership that have not only shaped my own leadership style but also underscored the importance of nurturing the future leaders of our nation. This study demonstrated to me how the seeds of an authentic leader are planted and cultivated.

Authentic leadership, as I have come to understand it, is rooted in the genuine and unwavering commitment to one's values and principles. It involves leading with integrity, transparency, and a deep sense of self-awareness (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Lyubovnikova et al., 2017). One of the most profound examples of authentic leadership that I encountered early in my career was during my time as a young platoon leader.

I remember LTC Jassey, my second Air Defense Artillery Battalion Commander, vividly. He was a man of unshakable moral character, leading by example in every aspect

of his life. LTC Jassey instilled in me the importance of integrity and accountability. His dedication to his soldiers was unparalleled; he knew each of us personally, and he genuinely cared about our well-being. I learned from him that being an authentic leader means valuing and investing in the people you lead. However, what stood out the most to me was a focus on his faith and openness to share it and hold to his convictions.

When I look to my personal experience of serving as an authentic leader, I have adopted a similar approach. Most important to me is my faith as well. I made it a point to try and model what I believe with everyone with whom I interact and let those around me know how important my faith is. I believe being an authentic leader is just being myself and not trying to be someone else. I found most people respect authentic leaders much more. Keeping those who are led first place is what authentic leaders do.

When I embarked on this study, my intent was to understand how Generation Z students described their leadership development experience. I delved into the lived experiences of ROTC students. I wanted to learn how they viewed leadership and what motivated them during their leadership training. I intended to hear about the adventure and hard-core training that they had the opportunity to participate, while simultaneously discussing their career aspirations and focus on them individually. What I learned was much different. I found ROTC students from Generation Z developed numerous individual leadership attributes and competencies such as confidence, resiliency, and adaptability; however, the aspects about which they were most passionate were their examples of empathy and peer collaboration and camaraderie. The current generation of ROTC cadets is goal oriented and highly focused on achieving those goals; however, they

want to achieve success through a team collaborative approach. They want everyone to succeed and not just themselves.

The military by its nature is hierarchical and only so many will achieve the highest ranks. This can lead to competitiveness among peers. The same is true of the ROTC structure. There can only be one cadet battalion commander. In those I interviewed and observed, title and position did not stand out as what was important to them. Although they all shared a common goal of commissioning, they described their responsibility to train and develop others as their key focus. The cadets demonstrated and described with their responses a significant level of emotional intelligence. I believe this is where the seeds of an authentic leader are planted and cultivated. The cadets were committed to set a new example of what a leader should be.

As I transition from being a leader in the Army to an educator with the Junior ROTC, I find myself passionate about equipping the next generation of leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in the military and beyond. My doctoral phenomenological study on leadership development for ROTC students represents the culmination of my journey in the Army and my commitment to the future of leadership. I will serve as an inspiring example wherever my journey leads me.

In conclusion, my 30-year journey in the Army has provided me vast experiences and opportunities to grow personally and make a difference in so many individuals lives. I have been shaped by many inspiring leaders who have demonstrated truly what an authentic leader is, how they interact and what is most important to them. Simultaneously, the ROTC cadets in my study encouraged me that young leaders have the correct mindset with a people-first mentality ready to serve and develop others. I am

excited to take my experiences in leadership rooted in integrity and concern for the welfare of others to train new leaders to serve either in the military or as outstanding citizens in the community.

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

Upon completion of a phenomenological study, the researcher should evaluate how the findings of the study are similar to or different from those discussed in the review of the literature (Moustakas, 1994). In the review of the literature, I discussed three theoretical frameworks: social constructivist theory from Vygotsky (Harasim, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), and experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

The study's findings strongly supported Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which asserted that learning is a social and collaborative process influenced by cultural and social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Cadet responses aligned closely with Vygotsky's theory, as their ROTC experiences exemplify key principles of social interaction, the zone of proximal development, scaffolding, collaboration, and cultural tools and language. Vygotsky's (1978) theory emphasized the importance of social interaction in the learning process, and cadet descriptions highlighted how interactions in the ROTC program played a crucial role in their leadership development. For example, cadet Echo described learning from upperclassmen about the type of leader he aspires to be. Similarly, cadet Golf acknowledged that the interactions with leaders above him influenced his understanding of leadership. Central to Vygotsky's theory is the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where learning occurs in the gap between a learner's current ability and their potential with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). The cadets'

progression through the ROTC program mirrors the ZPD, as they take on increasing challenges beyond their current capabilities with support from the ROTC community.

Vygotsky (1978) introduced the concept of scaffolding, where more knowledgeable individuals provide guidance to learners as they engage in activities just beyond their current competence. The cadets' experiences exemplify this concept, as they receive guidance from upperclassmen and gradually become scaffolds for newer cadets. For example, cadet Delta mentions how upperclassmen provided guidance and created opportunities for their peers, a form of scaffolding.

Collaborative learning is a fundamental aspect of Vygotsky's (1978) theory, and cadets' descriptions reflect this through interactions with peers and leaders. Additionally, the cadets' use of ROTC-specific language demonstrates the influence of cultural tools and language in shaping their understanding of leadership. Their use of terminology like "MS I," "MS II," "Squad Leader," and "Battalion Commander" reflects their incorporation of these cultural tools into their understanding of leadership and their roles in the program.

Some aspects of the cadets' experiences may not align perfectly with Vygotsky's (1978) theory. Personal reflection and individual growth, not solely influenced by social interactions, play a role in their leadership development. Additionally, although cultural tools are mentioned, the emphasis on how these tools shape learning experiences varies.

In Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, the cadets' descriptions align with the theory's emphasis on learning through observation, modeling, and interactions with others. They learn by observing the behaviors of role models and adjusting their actions based on the outcomes, reflecting Bandura's principles. Cadet Echo, for instance,

describes his leadership development journey as a staircase, starting from the bottom as an MS I and learning from upperclassmen.

Bandura's (1977) theory places a strong emphasis on self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to perform tasks successfully. As cadets progress through the program, they develop confidence in their leadership abilities, which is a key component of Bandura's theory. The role of reinforcement and motivation in learning is also evident in the cadets' experiences, as they adjust their behaviors based on feedback and are motivated by positive outcomes in their leadership roles. Some elements of the cadets' experiences, such as personal growth and intrinsic motivation, may not align perfectly with Bandura's (1977) theory, which focuses on external reinforcement and imitation.

In Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, the cadets' experiences align well with the theory's stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (see Table 3). They undergo concrete experiences through leadership training, followed by reflective observation and assessment, leading to the formation of abstract concepts and theories about leadership. Finally, they actively experiment with different leadership approaches (Pierson, 2017). Cadet Alpha, for example, mentioned applying the leadership skills learned in ROTC to his civilian life, such as speaking up more, taking initiative, and engaging in conversations with others.

Table 3

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory ROTC Correlation

Stages	ROTC Correlation
Concrete Experience	Cadet Leadership training and activities in ROTC
	Participation in Cadet Summer Training, progression from MS I to MS IV
	Leadership positions in ROTC, improved confidence and leadership skills
Reflective Observation	Self-reflection and assessment of their leadership development experiences
	After action reviews, blue cards, acknowledgement of room for improvement
	Learning from failures and challenging experiences
Abstract Conceptualization	Understanding differences in military and civilian leadership
	Leading physical training sessions; inspiring and motivating Cadets
	Adapting their approach based on the situation and the individuals they lead
Active Experimentation	Applying leadership skills during training in ROTC
	Transferring ROTC leadership to civilian life; public speaking, counseling and mentoring
	Continuously refining leadership skills

Some aspects of the cadets' experiences may not align perfectly with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. For example, the cadets' discussions primarily focused on the practical lessons learned and direct applications of their experiences, with less emphasis on reflective and conceptualization aspects. Additionally, they tend to view challenges and failures as opportunities for growth and resilience, rather than delving deeply into reflective analysis of what went wrong (Kolb, 1984).

The common thread that connects the three learning theories—Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory—is the recognition of the overlap between social interaction, personal experiences, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. These theories collectively emphasize the many faces of learning and how it unfolds through various stages, influenced by external factors and internal cognitive processes (Bandura, 1977; Harasim, 2017; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978)

First and foremost, social interaction plays a central role in all three theories. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory highlights the significance of learning as a collaborative process that occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable peers and adults. Similarly, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory emphasizes that individuals acquire new behaviors and attitudes by observing and imitating the actions of others, highlighting the role of social modeling. Even in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, social interaction is embedded in the learning cycle as individuals engage with others and reflect on their experiences together.

Additionally, all three theories recognize the importance of feedback and reinforcement in the learning process. Vygotsky's (1978) theory emphasizes scaffolding, where more knowledgeable individuals provide guidance and support to learners (Harasim, 2017). Bandura's (1977) theory highlights how individuals adjust their behaviors based on the outcomes of their actions, influenced by social rewards and punishments. Kolb's (1984) theory suggests that individuals actively experiment with different approaches and behaviors, which may lead to positive or negative consequences (Pierson, 2017).

Another common theme is the role of reflection and self-awareness in learning. In Vygotsky's (1978) theory, reflection is embedded in the collaborative process as individuals discuss, analyze, and make sense of their experiences together. Bandura's (1977) theory recognizes the importance of self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to perform tasks successfully, which is closely related to self-awareness. In Kolb's (1984) theory, the reflective observation stage involves introspection and self-assessment as individuals consider the outcomes of their actions. As discussed previously, the cadets interviewed for this study did not highly emphasize their time spent in reflection but rather focused on next steps in their journey while learning from their mistakes.

Lastly, these theories collectively acknowledge that learning is a dynamic and continuous process. Vygotsky's (1978) theory notes the ongoing construction of knowledge through social interactions. Bandura's (1977) theory highlights how individuals continuously adjust their behaviors based on the consequences they observe. Kolb's (1984) theory represents learning as a cyclical process, where individuals continually move through the stages as they acquire new experiences and insights (Pierson, 2017).

In summary, the Army ROTC cadets' experiences align with the core principles of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. These theories provide valuable perspective for understanding how the cadets described their leadership development experiences, although some aspects of their experiences may not align perfectly with each theory. Overall, the combination of these theories offers a comprehensive

framework for understanding the complexity of the learning process, including how it applies to the leadership development experiences of Army ROTC cadets.

Delimitations

There were two delimitations in this study that were related to the target population. First, participation in the ROTC program is available to college students with either prior military experience or students with zero experience. A student who participates in the ROTC program with prior service indicates that they have completed a military basic training course and, in some cases, have also completed their advanced individual training in which they are trained in a specific military trade. Cadets who have prior service experience provide a wealth of knowledge and attributes such as discipline and confidence, which other students graduating from high school may not possess when they join the ROTC program. In addition, the stress of being indoctrinated into the military customs and courtesy in addition to being new to college or university is not as challenging for prior service cadets, and they assimilate much quicker into the ROTC program. In this study, cadets with prior service experience were not permitted to participate in the study. The intent of the study was to use a homogeneous population that had no prior service experience to gather a clear depiction of the leadership attributes and competencies developed over the course of 4 years participation in ROTC.

The second delimitation was the decision to only include MS IV cadets who participated in the CST. In this study, the focus was to identify which leadership attributes and competencies the cadets developed and the influence of peer leadership as part of their leadership development experience over the course of 4 years of participation inclusive of attending the CST after their junior year. The MS IV cadets

could provide much more comprehensive experiences upon which to draw versus cadets from the MS I thru MS III year classes.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses associated with the research design, time constraints, instruments, or samples generally outside the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The most significant limitation was the sample size, which only provided for more generalized results for the study. Participants from this study were all a member of the same ROTC program. Additionally, the sample size from the same ROTC program provided limited ethnic diversity. There are four Army ROTC programs across the state of New Jersey, both public and private universities, which could have provided a richer discussion for comparison of responses among the cadets.

The study design created the second limitation for the study regarding researcher bias. Alase (2017) stated during phenomenological research, the only time the researcher should bracket or keep his/her preconception out of the process is during interviews of participants and collection of research data. According to Smith at al. (2009), bracketing one's preconception during interviews enables participants to express their concerns and make their claims on their own terms. Bracketing was integral in this study for me due to my prior experiences as an Army ROTC cadet and serving as an instructor with the Army ROTC program, in addition to 29 years of leadership development experience in my career as a military officer.

Implications for Practice

College-based leadership development programs can draw valuable insights from the Army ROTC model to enhance their effectiveness in shaping future leaders. These

insights can be applied across various facets of program design and implementation. First and most importantly, college-based leadership development programs can emulate the Army ROTC's emphasis on experiential learning. In the ROTC, leadership is not merely taught in a classroom setting, it is cultivated through hands-on experiences such as leadership roles, field training exercises, and real-world challenges. To mirror this approach, college programs can incorporate internships, cooperative education opportunities, or service-learning projects that expose students to practical leadership situations. Secondly, college-based leadership development programs need to add more focus to peer relationships and group activity in their leadership development program design. Focus on an individualistic leadership perspective needs to shift to a collective emergent perspective that considers leadership a group activity (Day et al., 2021; McCauley & Palus, 2021). By actively engaging with real-life scenarios and peer and group activity, participants can develop problem-solving skills, decision-making abilities, adaptability, and other leadership attributes and competencies.

Similar to the ROTC, college leadership programs can instill a strong sense of ethics and values in their participants. The Army ROTC places great emphasis on the Army Values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. College programs can similarly define and promote a set of core values that guide ethical behavior and decision making among their aspiring leaders. This ethical foundation not only enhances leadership integrity but also fosters trust and respect among peers and subordinates (Treviño et al., 2000; Weaver et al., 2005).

Another practical implication is the use of mentorship and coaching. ROTC cadets benefit from close mentorship relationships with experienced military cadre, both

officers and non-commissioned officers. College-based programs can implement mentorship systems, pairing students with seasoned professionals or alumni who can offer guidance, share experiences, and provide constructive feedback. These mentorship relationships can help students develop leadership skills, expand their networks, and gain valuable insights into their chosen fields (Lea et al., 2003).

Additionally, college leadership programs can adopt a structured and progressive leadership development curriculum (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005). The Army ROTC's curriculum is carefully designed to build leadership skills progressively, starting with foundational concepts and gradually advancing to more complex scenarios. College programs can similarly structure their coursework to ensure that students develop leadership competencies step by step. This progressive curriculum might involve offering courses in leadership theory, group dynamics, conflict resolution, and project management, with each building on the knowledge and skills acquired in the previous stages (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005).

The Army ROTC prioritizes physical fitness and personal discipline as essential components of leadership development. College programs such as outdoor recreation leadership development programs and others can incorporate physical training and wellness initiatives into their offerings to promote discipline, resilience, and teamwork. Encouraging students to maintain a healthy lifestyle can have a positive impact on their leadership capabilities and overall well-being.

College leadership programs can integrate assessments and feedback mechanisms to help students monitor their progress and identify areas for improvement, similar to the ROTC's regular evaluations that occur after all training events such as leadership labs

and FTXs. These assessments can include self-assessments, peer evaluations, and faculty assessments, all of which contribute to a well-rounded view of a student's leadership potential (Lea et al., 2003).

Lastly, specific to the ROTC program, there were two leadership competencies that were not directly addressed. Those competencies from the ALRM were stewards the profession and get results. Stewards the profession involves supporting professional and personal growth and improving the organization (ADP, 2019). The ROTC cadre can consider numerous methods to enforce understanding and development of this competency. First, it could increase its mentorship programs connecting cadets with experienced military leaders external from the cadre of local military units from the National Guard or U.S. Army Reserves who exemplify these competencies, which allows for valuable learning from role models. The simultaneous membership program is available only for cadets who are currently serving in the National Guard or Army Reserves. This program allows cadets to participate in Army ROTC while simultaneously drilling in a part time status with a reserve component unit and shadowing military officers. Cadets not participating in this program are not afforded this additional mentorship. Inviting other military officers to mentor the other cadets would be invaluable. Additionally, the ROTC cadre can seek opportunities for their cadets to attend professional development sessions offered by local military units or other veterans organizations who offer insight into military topics and career options. A final valuable method is to increase the frequency of changing leadership assignments for MS IV cadets, at least once per semester, to provide more cadets with experience in key leadership positions. Although this recommendation does break continuity of the cadet

staff, it does provide for adaptability and professional growth for the MS IV prior to commissioning.

The leadership competency of Get Results focuses on tasks, priorities, people, and other resources to achieve the desired outcomes (ADP, 2019). First, the cadre can integrate comprehensive ethics and values training into the curriculum, emphasizing the importance of upholding the Army's core values and professional standards. Additionally, real-world case studies and scenarios can be included in the training to challenge cadets in applying ethical decision-making principles. Ethics and values training are important because all assigned tasks and missions must be completed to a high ethical standard representative of the organization. Secondly, depending on the size of the ROTC program, each MS IV should be assigned a leadership lab to plan, resource, and execute and then receive feedback from the cadre. If not a lab, then other significant events or responsibilities should be assigned, which will challenge the cadets to prioritize and organize teams, assess team capabilities and required tasks, mediate conflicts, allocate resources, remove barriers, and execute the mission (ADP, 2019). Another key task to develop this competency is to challenge cadets to develop a mechanism to reward individual and team successes and provide a feedback plan to facilitate consistent improvement. Lastly, the ROTC program could direct all cadets to maintain reflective journals that can reinforce the importance of achieving objectives and promote personal growth.

Overall, college-based leadership development programs can adopt some of the ROTC program best practices such as emphasizing experiential learning, promoting mentorship, implementing a structured curriculum, and integrating assessment and

feedback mechanisms. The ROTC program specifically could invest more time in the classroom training the ALRM concepts from ADP 6-22 and reinforce with experiential training opportunities. By adopting these practical implications, these programs can better prepare their students for leadership roles in various fields, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and character necessary for success.

Recommendations for Future Research

The cadets who participated in this study shared their leadership development experiences from their participation in the ROTC program from their MS I through MS IV years. The activities that influenced and shaped their leader identity include participation in physical training, leadership labs, FTX, CST and cadet specialty schools. However, this study focused on a small, homogenous group of Generation Z MS IV cadets, which was identified as a delimitation in this study. Future studies could involve cadets from the MS I though MS III classes to determine when leadership attributes and competencies are developed and which leadership attributes and competencies are developed during each MS year. Additionally, using a larger and more inclusive population of cadets could be used to explore when cadets identify as leaders. Further, future studies could use student populations from other multisemester campus-based leadership development programs that were highlighted in Chapter 2 of this study to include outdoor recreation programs, intercollegiate athletics, student life, and student mentoring programs to explore how these students describe their leadership development experience.

Lastly, to address the other delimitation identified during the study was the incorporation of prior service cadets in the study regardless of MS level. Prior service

cadets provide a vast knowledge base of information related to the military. They may have developed leadership attributes and competencies that new cadets currently do not possess from their experience at military basic training. An alternate study could examine which leadership attributes and competencies they do bring to the ROTC program and which ones they develop as a member of the program. These prior service cadets' experience and needs can be vastly different than other cadets in the program.

Conclusion

Campus based ROTC programs across the country not only serve as a model for leadership development but remain a crucible of leadership to shape the future leaders of the most recent generation of students in higher education. The ROTC has been a tapestry of new experiences that have shaped the cadets' understanding of leadership. A profound responsibility comes with leadership, particularly for ROTC cadets training to become commissioned officers. They understand leadership is a sacred trust that requires a continuous commitment to growth and improvement to serve and protect those under their charge. This study found leadership development in higher education and, specifically in ROTC, must continue to place a high value on the attributes of character building, core values, empathy, and peer collaboration. These durable leadership attributes and competencies, codified by the ALRM, which the ROTC cadets achieved or enhanced through their experiential learning experience, are integral to their leadership development in Army ROTC. They provide the framework and skills necessary for the cadets to become effective leaders both in the program and in their future military careers. They lay the groundwork for long-term leadership growth. As the cadets practice

and internalize these competencies, they build a solid foundation that extends beyond their time in ROTC.

Secondly, this study found students from Generation Z prefer peer led training where they train and learn in group settings and have opportunities to provide guidance and mentorship to their peers. The cadet's focus revolves around inspiring and motivating others to reach their full potential, which can increase trust among peers and lead to a more cohesive unit. In turn, this creates the opportunity for these cadets to become role models for their peers and those coming after them. Ultimately, the combination of durable leadership attributes and competencies developed over time in the ROTC program combined with peer leadership among Generation Z ROTC cadets continues to facilitate a leadership development experience that can create a culture of leadership excellence both during their time in ROTC and in their future assignments as commissioned officers. ROTC provides a journey of growth, reflection and the unwavering belief that leadership, at its core, is a force for positive change and progress. The cadets of Generation Z are ready to take charge and lead!

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Email Subject/Letter Heading: Leadership Development in Generation Z Students

Hello,
I am writing to you about a volunteer opportunity to participate in a research study titled: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Leadership Development for College Students in an Army ROTC Program. This study will ask you to share your experiences with leadership development while participating in the Army ROTC program. Potential benefits of this important research study include addressing the gap in the literature on student centered learning in conjunction with Generation Z ROTC students, providing recommendations for effective strategies to address the challenges posed by the learning styles of the Generation Z students, and providing insight into the durable leader attributes and competencies most reflective of Generation Z Cadets for future development in the ROTC program. Lastly, this study may address the gap in the literature analyzing peer leadership development of ROTC military Cadet training regardless of the student generation.
You may volunteer to participate in this study if you are a Cadet who is currently in their Senior year of college and participating in the Military Science level 4 (MS IV). Further, you must have completed all four years of the ROTC leadership training, completed the Leadership Assessment Course at Ft Knox, and did not have prior military service prior to participating in the ROTC program. Your participation will require you to participate in an interview regarding your experiences in the Army ROTC program for approximately 40 to 75 minutes in length. This research study will take place at Seton Hall University Mooney Hall in the 4th floor ROTC conference room.
Contact Mr Joseph Gagnon, Co-Investigator, by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at xxxx@students.rowan.edu about this research study.
This study has been approved by Rowan University's IRB (Study # PRO-2023-87)
Sincerely,

Mr Joseph Gagnon

Appendix B

Adult Consent Form for Social and Behavioral Research

Title: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Leadership Development for College Students in an Army ROTC Program
Principal Investigator: Dr Jo Ann Manning

College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership
James Hall
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

XXX-XXX-XXXX
xxxx@rowan.edu

KEY INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

TITLE OF STUDY: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Leadership Development for College Students in an Army ROTC Program
Principal Investigator: Dr Jo Ann Manning

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide key information that will help you decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study.

Please carefully read the key information provided in questions 1-9 and 14 below. The purpose behind those questions is to provide clear information about the purpose of the study, study specific information about what will happen in the course of the study, what are the anticipated risks and benefits, and what alternatives are available to you if you do not wish to participate in this research study.

The study team will explain the study to you and they will answer any question you might have before volunteering to take part in this study. It is important that you take your time to make your decision. You may take this consent form with you to ask a family member or anyone else before agreeing to participate in the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask the study team and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

The Principal Investigator, Dr Jo Ann Manning, or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent.

1. W**hat is the purpose of the study?**
   A Phenomenological Study which is being conducted at the Army ROTC at Seton Hall University under the direction of Dr Jo Ann Manning. The purpose of the study is to explore leadership development for Generation Z ROTC students. The study will address the gap in the literature with Generation Z ROTC leadership development which uses Student Centered Experiential Learning and peer leadership. This study is in support of a doctoral dissertation for Mr Joseph Gagnon.

2. **Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**
   You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a Cadet in the Army ROTC program. You are currently in your Military Science Level IV year of ROTC training and have participated in the program for all four years from Military Science Level 1 through Military Science Level 4. Lastly you do not have prior military service.

3. **What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**
   You will be asked to meet with Mr Joseph Gagnon in the 4th floor ROTC conference room in Mooney Hall at Seton Hall University and asked to participate in an interview. The interview will be audio recorded so that it can later be transcribed for data analysis. After you have completed your participation, the research team will debrief you about the data, theory and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

4. **Who may take part in this research study? And who may not?**
   This study is specific to students participating in the Army ROTC program at Seton Hall University. All students must be above 18 years. It will include both male and female students irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. To be included in the study, Cadets must currently be in their Senior year of college and participating in the Military Science level 4. Further as part of my purposeful selection, Cadets must have completed all four years of the ROTC leadership training, completed the Leadership Assessment Course at Ft Knox, and did not have prior military service prior to participating in the ROTC program. The study specifically looked for a homogenous group of Cadets whom started at the same developmental level as Military Science

Level One during their freshmen year and now have a total of four years of leadership development training. Those who do not fit this criteria are excluded from this study.

5. **How long will the study take and where will the research study be conducted?**
   This study will take 40-75 minutes to complete. The interview will be conducted in the 4th floor ROTC conference room in Mooney Hall at Seton Hall University.

6. **How many visits may take to complete the study?**
   It will take one visit to complete this study.

7. **What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**
   There are minimal risks to participation in this study. The potential risks include: feeling anxious answering personal interview questions or questions regarding performance from your ROTC Blue Cards. You are welcome to stop the interview at any time.
   There is no financial risk involved in this study.

8. **Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?**
   The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you will learn more about the shared lived experience of participating in a ROTC leadership development program and the relevancy leadership attributes and competencies for military leaders.

9. **What are the alternatives if you do not wish to participate in the study?**
   Your alternative is not to participate in the study.

10. **How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?**
    There will be six subjects to be enrolled in the study.

11. **How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?**
    During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

12. **Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?**
    There will be no cost to you to participate in this study.

13. **Will you be paid to take part in this study?**
    You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

14. **Are you providing any identifiable private information as part of this research study?**
    This research study is not collecting identifiable private information. Each participant will be referred with a pseudonym.

15. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. Data for this research study will be maintained locally with Mr Joseph Gagnon and will only be viewed by him and the principal investigator, Dr Manning.

16. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Dr Jo Ann Manning, Principal Investigator, Rowan University, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028, attention College of Education.

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

17. Who can you call if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Dr Jo Ann Manning
Educational Leadership Department
XXX-XXX-XXXX

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance
(XXX) XXX-XXXX– Glassboro/CMSRU

18. What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read the entire information about the research study, research risks, benefits and the alternatives, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed.

All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered and I agree to volunteer to participate in the study.

Subject Name:_____

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:
To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent:_____

Signature: _____ Date_____

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Cadets

Semistructured Interview questions for Cadets

Cadets will be asked the following questions in order to better gauge and understand their personal interpretation of leader development, their development of the leadership attributes and competencies, and their experiences with peer leadership.

1. How do you describe your leadership experience as a ROTC Cadet? (RQ1)
2. What are some of the feelings you associate with your leadership development experience? (RQ1)
3. How has ROTC contributed to your own leadership development?(RQ1)
4. Describe your learning style (passive, hands-on, collaborative, etc.) and was that compatible with the instructional methods used in the ROTC program? Explain. Describe how Seton Hall ROTC conducted leadership training for the Cadets. Who ran the program? Is there anything additional or different that ROTC could do to improve your leadership experience?(RQ2)
5. How does your ROTC leadership development experience differ from other leadership courses or programs you have been associated with? Which is more effective? (RQ2)
6. Share what you believe are key attributes of a leader. (RQ2)
7. What leader attributes do you see yourself having now that you did not possess before your participation in ROTC? (RQ2)
8. Describe examples of your leadership attributes from your time in the ROTC program. (RQ2)
9. Share what you believe are key competencies of a leader. (RQ2)
10. What leader competencies do you see yourself having now that you did not possess before your participation in the ROTC program? (RQ2)

11. Describe examples of your leadership competencies from your time in the ROTC program. (RQ2)

12. How did peer leadership during ROTC impact your leadership development? What did your peers do to assist your growth (RQ3)

13. Provide an example how your peer leadership impacted other Cadets in ROTC. How is your feedback received by junior Cadets? (RQ3)

Appendix D

List of Abbreviations

ALRM……Army Leadership Requirements Model

CST…….Cadet Summer Training

MS I……Military Science Level 1

MS II……...Military Science Level 2

MS III……..Military Science Level 3

MS IV……..Military Science Level 4

ROTC…….Reserve Officer Training Corps

SCL…….Student-Centered Learning

ZPD…….Zone of Proximal Development