

MOBILITY STRATEGIES AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS
WITHIN MILITARY FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narratological case study was to investigate the strategies military families utilize to contribute to the academic performance of highly mobile military-connected students. The unit of analysis was the strategies parents describe. These strategies included what is available for active duty military parents of 6th grade students that have moved three or more times. The problem addressed with this limited group of mobile military families was whether the previous duty station moves impacted the dependent child's academic performance. The limited research on the academic performance as related to military student mobility is in dire need of being addressed. In an attempt to discover if there were successful strategies having a positive impact on academic performance as related to these transient military families the questions I answered are: (1) How do military parents describe their experiences related to family mobility? (2) What strategies do highly mobile military parents identify that assist with student academics in a variety of educational settings? (3) What support mechanisms for education do military parents receive to assist

with mobility? and (4) What concerns would mobile military families like to see addressed for additional support in transition?

Through the process of “themeing the data”, four themes central to the study of mobile military families were apprehended: (1) Strategies (2) Identity (3) School/School Choice and (4) Moving/Mobility. The findings discovered from gathering the data centered around the successful strategies of use of technology for research, communication, parental involvement, and maintaining a positive attitude. Future research should expand on this study by gathering data from more military installations and including those families with a parent or parents that hold one of the enlisted ranks.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies have examined a dissertation titled “Mobility Strategies and Academic Success within Military Families,” presented by Keith Allen Mispagel, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education programs and practices are relied upon to effectively instruct a variety of students from an even wider variety of backgrounds (i.e. race/ethnicities, socioeconomic status, parental or guardian structures) and academic levels. Schools and districts must have academic/instructional goals and practices that work to improve all students' learning despite the need for assistance or enrichment. At the same time, many factors contribute to or deter from students' educational experiences and performances. One such factor impacting student achievement, explored in this study, was student mobility. Specifically, as presented throughout this study, student mobility of military children will remain the overarching focus.

Interestingly, mobility does not appear to have the same effect on academic performance for military children as it does for public school children not connected to the military (Garber, 2003; Sanderson, 2003). There is an apparent disconnect between the impact on the academic performance due to mobility for public school students and those public school students whose military connection is the cause of the transience. This study investigated strategies that career mobile military families utilize to assist their children with academics from one school to another, which also may be from state to state or country to country due to military assignment and relocation. Student mobility includes changing schools at the beginning of a year or within a school year already underway. For the purpose of this study, *mobility* was defined as students changing from school to school due to a family circumstance such as military change of duty station, job reassignment, family

restructuring, including divorce, separation, and other factors not related to promotion from one school level to another. Additionally for the purposes of this study, the terms mobility and transience (transient) were used interchangeably as synonymous with each other in definition/meaning. The mobile student can be transient over a summer period or within an existing school year. As this study explored mobile military student transience, it should be understood that the relocation of military families might not be associated with any regularity other than a change in military duty station orders.

To fully explore the phenomenon of mobility, I considered academic performance within non-military student populations based on the literature, but specifically focused on the mobile military-connected child. I discuss why mobility is a detriment to academics for all students and describe the experiences with mobility for mobile military-connected children. According to Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, & Sims (2001), “despite the implications of the statistics surrounding non-military transient students, and as related to migratory or homeless children, highly mobile military dependents perform at or above academic achievement levels compared to national averages for public schools” (p. 4).

My connection, and most importantly my interest in this study, is my current role as superintendent of schools at a public school district, which serves a large percentage of military-connected children in the Midwest. With my public school district serving a heavily populated military family student population in the Midwest, the uniqueness of my clientele provided for a strong research cross-section of mobility and academic performance. On a yearly basis, as determined from an annual internal audit from our student management system for attendance, an average of 50% of students move on to another duty station. This high level transiency creates an opportunity for me to be a part of the education of thousands

of students over a career. In my 18 years in the district, I estimate I have been a part of the education of over 15,000 students in Kindergarten through ninth grade. Hence, interest in this study lies with thousands of individual students who have inspired me to study the successes they achieve, and the challenges they face while on their journey towards adulthood and career readiness. Though each student is at different levels academically, socially, and emotionally, how do they succeed in a time when they have been mobile for many years and have to start over every place they move? The district provides an ideal setting for the research because of the high volume of transient students each year.

Students enter school (and new schools) with varying degrees of background exposure to academics and many times a variety of real world experiences. For example, as published in “On the Move” magazine by the Military Child Education Coalition (Newman, 2011), high school junior Rachel Newman shared her story of time spent in Cairo, Egypt. Her specific story is unique to mobility and her father’s employment, but not uncommon as an experience of a mobile military family that relocates frequently. Rachel’s father became the Army Attaché at the American Embassy in Egypt. She was able to immerse herself in the Egyptian culture and tour/travel all over Europe while enrolled in the Cairo American College (an American private school). Her time there was not always filled with pleasant memories. On January 25, 2010, the Egyptian Revolution known as “Police Day” began and tensions were high. Rachel and her friends talked at school about the possibility of evacuation from the country. Rachel was not convinced this would happen, even though she had experienced it previously while at another duty station after the terrorist attacks on 9/11. School was closed until further notice and then the phone call came for evacuation in 24 hours with one suitcase and one carry-on bag. Even pets would have to stay behind. The

brief and quick goodbye to friends was not adequate, and the arrival to her hometown in Texas mid-year was filled with anxiety and excitement.

Rachel's perspective on transitioning from Egypt is not unlike the many real world experiences other mobile military students encounter. Whether it is with mobile military students or public school students in general, it is not a fair assumption that their previous year's school experience or setting was comparable to their new situation. Additionally, excessive mobility may create an environment in which teachers have students above, on, and below grade level academically within the same homeroom (Temple & Reynolds, 2000). This presents a challenge for teachers to differentiate instruction for a variety of learners and levels. According to data from the General Accounting Office (GAO) Report (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010), which followed a cohort of kindergarteners from 1998 to 2007, "the majority of students—about 70 percent—changed schools two times or less and about 18 percent changed three times before reaching high school" (p. 4). There is a trend of transience continuing with little hope of addressing this educational issue if schools do not realize the impact mobility can have within public school settings. This study focused on military-connected students within a public school setting; however, it has implications for mobility pertaining to non-military students

Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problem "may be a misnomer" (Creswell, 2013, p. 130) and the novice researcher may struggle with developing this area. Ellis and Levy (2008) clarifies a problem statement: "From a scientific perspective, a research problem is defined as a general issue, concern, or controversy addressed in research" (p. 22). This study is embedded with gaps in the literature about the nature of mobility for military and non-military students.

While the research suggests that the academics of non-military public school students are influenced by mobility, less attention is given to the achievement of mobile military-connected students; hence, contributing to the gap in the literature related to the nature of mobility for military-connected students. In a Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) study conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) (2011), findings were “without taking student demographics and other factors into account, military-connected districts performed better than other districts in mathematics and English language arts” (p. 25). Figure 1 shows a table from the United States Department of Education (USDoE) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1998) and provides National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from a three-year span of eighth grade reading scores at the national, state, and Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools based on mobility among non-military and military-connected students. The data reflects in the three-year span, that DoDEA students average scale scores in eighth grade reading were higher with none, one, two, and three or more moves.

TABLE 1

Average scale scores for reading, grade 8 by times changed school in past two years [B007301], year and jurisdiction: 1998, 1994, and 1992

Year	Jurisdiction	None		1		2		3 or more	
		Avg. scale score	Std. Error	Avg. scale score	Std. Error	Avg. scale score	Std. Error	Avg. scale score	Std. Error
1992 [†]	National public								
	Kansas	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)
	DoDEA	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)
1994 [†]	National public	263	(0.9)	254	(1.4)	245	(1.9)	241	(1.8)
	Kansas	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)
	DoDEA	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)	—	(+)
1998 [†]	National public	265	(0.8)	256	(1.2)	246	(2.2)	245	(2.7)
	Kansas	271	(1.0)	260	(3.4)	+	(+)	256	(4.9)
	DoDEA	270	(1.2)	274	(1.4)	265	(3.9)	257	(3.6)

— Not available. † Not applicable. ‡ Reporting standards not met.

NOTE: The NAEP Reading scale ranges from 0 to 500. Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant.

SOURCE: USDoE, Institute of Education Sciences, NCES, NAEP, 1992, 1994 and 1998 Reading Assessments.

Figure 1. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1998) provides National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Data

Summarily, mobile military-connected children are less affected by mobility than non-military children. Research indicates a structured environment and standard curriculum consistency, as well as military support mechanisms in place, are factors supporting mobile military-connected children being less affected by frequent relocation than other non-military mobile children (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Jensen, P. S., Watanabe, H. K., Richters, J. E., Cortes, R., Roper, M., & Liu, S., 1995). Additionally, relocation can have positive effects on academics because the mobile military-connected child can look at the move as an opportunity to change behaviors (Drummet et al., 2003).

A number of researchers have conducted quantitative and qualitative studies of public school settings, which showed limited academic progress for transient non-military K-12 students (Cox, 1992; Garber, 2003; Ingersoll, 1988; Sanderson, 2003). According to Kerbow (1996), those students moving multiple times in an educational career often have varying experiences of academic success. Students that move one time will have an adjustment period because of the transition, but will recover most likely and resume previous academic growth and achievement levels. On the other hand, students experiencing multiple moves fair less well academically. Students who experience multiple changes of schools have an adjustment period that extends across years and several different schools; this is a cumulative aspect of the effects of mobility (p. 16). Missing key concepts may be critical to normal progress, specifically in mathematics where logical progression is based on building block skills in the curriculum. While in some classes lack of exposure may not be crucial, missing exposure to key concepts and prerequisite skills is a detriment that may be carried through multiple grades (Kerbow, 1996).

Schools and districts educating a highly mobile population are challenged with meeting the academic needs of all students whether temporarily assigned to their homeroom or permanent for the entire school year. In 2003, Columbus Public Schools commissioned Roberta F. Garber to conduct a student mobility research project to “study the causes, patterns and impact of high student mobility” (p. i). Garber (2003) defined achievement as “passage of the fourth grade reading proficiency test by students in the primary data set who had ever taken the test (fourth and fifth grade students)”. Students in the fourth grade were grouped by mover and non-mover status in Columbus Public Schools. To illustrate the

magnitude of the data gathered, “Columbus Public School (CPS) school-year ‘movers’, the proficiency test passage rate decreased as the number of moves increased. The CPS ‘non-mover’ group had a passage rate that was ten to nearly twenty percentage points higher than all mover groups” (p. 4-16).

There is evidence that student mobility and academic performance has remained a problem for public schools and districts across the country. However, as previously asserted, less attention has been given to the plight of mobile military children from the several branches of our United States military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, National Guard, or Coast Guard). Smrekar et al. (2001) determined the students enrolled in Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) had an annual mobile rate of 35%; with 50% considered high-poverty students as determined by eligibility for free or reduced lunch rate; and 80% of DoDEA students have a parent or parents with no more than a high school degree (p. i). Not only is there a heavy presence of military-connected children in Department of Defense schools overseas, according to Keller (2000), more than half a million military students attended schools in one of 600 civilian public school districts (p. 1). Keller additionally noted that sacrifices made by the family and namely children are not often acknowledged. While there are positives to mobility (such as families treating the moves as a new adventure), there are hardships experienced as well including frequency of transitions; having to say goodbye to friends; being the new kid; and extended separation from parents (p. 1). Even with the challenges faced by mobile military-connected children, Smrekar et al. (2001) determined the academic success of the students in DoDEA are a combination of

factors in and out of school (p. i). Smrekar et al. (2001) provided a number of factors that contribute to the high academic performance of mobile military-connected students:

- Centralized direction setting with local decision making.
- Policy coherence and regular data flow regarding instructional goals, assessments, accountability, and professional training and development.
- Sufficient financial resources linked to instructionally relevant strategic goals.
- Staff development that is job-embedded, intensive, sustained over time, relevant to school improvement goals, and linked to student performance.
- Small school size, conducive to trust, communication and sense of community.
- Academic focus and high expectations for all students.
- Continuity of care for children in high quality pre-schools and after-school programs.
- A “corporate commitment” to public education that is material and symbolic and that is visible and responsive to parents within the school community (p. i).

The value placed on educational success in Department of Defense schools extends through the entire military community including parental support, involvement, structure, resiliency, and beneficial reinforcements promoting academic success (Smrekar et al., 2001; Viadero, 2000a). As asserted by Smrekar et al. (2001), “the culture of order, discipline, education and training in the military community creates ideal conditions for the schools focused upon these principles and expectations” (p. 30). Factors that may contribute to the academic success of military-connected children in spite of frequent mobility include resiliency, parental engagement and military supports.

In my experiences working closely with students in my district, resiliency among military-connected children is not a characteristic that is taught but rather developed individually and to different levels as well. Resilience is a universal capacity, with meanings that may vary among cultures, and allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity (Grotberg, 1997). As a result of

experiencing adversity, individuals may be transformed by the experience or become stronger which helps to mitigate future experiences with adversity. According to Ungar (2005), a child's resilience results from "their successfully navigating their way to the services, structures and relationships (health resources) and their negotiations to have services provided in child-focused ways that sustain their well-being" (p. 429). With the help of parents or significant others, the child is able to overcome anxiety or trauma related to adversity. Over 40 years of research tells us that students become capable, productive, and compassionate persons when identified and nurtured in their capacities through resilience education rather than give attention to their deficits (Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001).

Helping the child become resilient requires parental engagement with the child in all aspects of their lives, including education inside and outside the school setting. Parental engagement with the child inside and outside the school community has been found to be linked to learning outcomes for students (Cullinan, Eaves, McCurdy, & McCain, 1992; Epstein, 1995). In my current school district, parental engagement and involvement is a community expectation that is unwritten but assumed as part of the military structure and culture. Sharkey, You, & Schnoebelen (2008) state,

Adolescents who have family relationships that are negative may be at risk for poorer student engagement, whereas those with especially positive family relationships may be more likely to have healthier engagement. When considering the role of family relationships as a risk or asset related to student engagement, it is also important to consider that positive family relationships have an indirect effect on student engagement via internal traits and competencies. (p. 404)

The communication between home and school is a factor that can promote success and support. Sharkey et al. (2008) highlights "the importance of relationships with teachers,

participation in activities, school expectations, and mutual respect in relation to student engagement” (p. 405).

Another area associated with minimum academic gaps among military-connected students is the level of support and influence by the military for the success of the soldier and family. The Army, as stated by Viadero (2000b), specifically tells soldiers their “place of duty” (p. 3) is at parent-teacher conferences when scheduled. The military is so involved and focused on soldiers and their abilities to stay focused on the mission, and the family that “family members who become troublemakers in school or in the community can be shipped back home to the states” (p. 3). As with my current district, commanders are interested and involved with the lives of the soldiers they command and their families. This involves all aspects including school. This true community support and involvement creates a partnership for success in school within a highly mobile military-connected public school system. As I have experienced in my current school district with military-connected children, other challenges most children cannot sympathize with nor will experience related to military mobility include socialization with new peers, changing curriculum from state to state, continual relocation to new duty stations for their parent(s), and family separation when a parent is deployed. There is no formal preparation for a military child to understand or accept that their parent must be deployed to a war zone for over 12 months, or receive new orders to move in a short period of time, across the country or sometimes overseas. The more frequent the moves, the more mental preparation and moving structure come in to planning. All in all, it is different for every family as well as every child but difficult nonetheless. Chandra et al. (2011) reported on experiences of youth and spouses of military families and identified several difficulties for mobile youth in the military. These factors

included emotional difficulties, anxiety, academic engagement difficulties, and behavior problems, all reported as significantly impacting the students (pp. 24-38).

While the American Institutes for Research (AIR) (2011) study suggested a “tendency for districts with larger percentages of military-connected students to perform better [academically] relative to other non-military districts” (p. 26), mobile military children are susceptible to social and emotional difficulties because of the frequent moves and challenges associated with a soldier’s career. These highly mobile children have a parent or even both parents who may be career service members. According to Smreker (2001), in Department of Defense schools (DoDs), the long-term deployment of a military parent often forces two-parent families to operate as one-parent households (p. 4).

This study explored the academic and social experiences of mobile military students in public schools. My personal experiences with military families reveal that most create relocation plans for a smooth transition of their children in schools. From working with, observing, and interacting with military families and their children, familial strategies that may be used are interventions developed through the intent to be resilient and successful in spite of continuous mobility. The concept of resilience, according to Bowen, Martin, and Mancini (2013), is often used to describe those families over time that successfully adapt to significant adversities and continue to complete day-to-day life tasks (p. 417).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narratological case study was to explore strategies that mobile military families in a public school district on military property utilize to assist with

academic and social needs, as they transition from duty station to duty station. Narratology focused on what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as “the four directions in any inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward” (p. 50). In that, “inward” focuses on internalization as in emotions, feelings, and moral dispositions; “outward” involves the “environment”; and “backward and forward” refer to the “past, present, and future” relative to the stories shared or told (p. 50). They continue,

To experience an experience – that is to do research into an experience – is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways. When one is positioned on this two-dimensional space in any particular inquiry, one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future. (p. 50)

I focused specifically on the active duty military families of sixth grade students who have moved three or more times during the child’s school-age years based on military assignments. The stories of the academic experiences of the children of mobile military families as told by parents were the units of analyses.

Case study, within this study, is best defined by Creswell (2013) as the investigator exploring “real-life, contemporary bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual material, documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97). With the use of stories collected to contribute to the data collection of each case, narrative inquiry was used to describe the experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990), describe narrative as both “phenomenon and method” (p. 2). They continue, “narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study” (p. 2). The full intent of the use of

narrative inquiry in this study was to describe the human experience holistically through the lens of the mobile military family. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) say, “people by nature lead storied lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 2).

Research Questions

Many questions arise in relation to student mobility and academic performance of military students. In an effort to identify the successful strategies that families used to assist their children with academic performance as related to these transient military families the questions I intend to answer are: (1) How do military parents describe their experiences related to family mobility? (2) What strategies do highly mobile military parents identify that assist with student academics in a variety of educational settings? (3) What support mechanisms for education do military parents receive to assist with mobility? and (4) What concerns would mobile military families like to see addressed for additional support in transition? For the purpose of this study, these questions will serve to bound the project (Maxwell, 2013).

Overview of Methodology

This study entailed using case study to explore the experiences of participants. More specifically, I used a narratological case study to explore strategies that mobile military families in a public school district on military property utilize to assist with academic and social needs of their children, as they transition from duty station to duty station. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative research involves “a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine

and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (p. 3). The decision to conduct a qualitative research study came with considerations of the topic and the data to be collected. Simply put, the data to be gathered through participation, interviews, and documents cannot be represented through numeric presentation or statistics alone, as is the basis of a quantitative study.

Narrative analysis as presented by Patton (2015) asks two "foundational questions" in an effort to define its idea(s), "What does this narrative or story reveal both about the person and world from which it came? How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?" (p. 98). To expand on the foundational questions, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, "the narrative inquirer may note stories but more often records actions, doings, and happenings, all of which are narrative expressions" (p. 79).

The setting was a public school district, entirely on federal property, with a large percentage of the population consisting of military children of active duty soldiers in one of the branches of armed forces. The stories of the academic experiences of the children of mobile military families as told by parents were the unit of analyses. I studied five transient military families representing the diverse make-up of the population at a military post in the Midwest. These families, which include the parents of school-aged children in the sixth grade, are to be considered a purposeful sampling due to what Patton (2015) describes as "qualitative purposeful sampling derived from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases" (p. 53). Additional criteria in selection of the families were established as well. This criterion sampling, or as Patton (2015) defines it "all cases that meeting some predetermined criterion of importance, thereby explicitly (or implicitly) comparing the

criterion cases with those that do not manifest the criterion” (p. 281), consist of three varying levels of maximum variation. Maximum variation is defined as variation of “the sample and research methods” to avoid “one-sidedness of representation of the topic” (p. 283). Within this study, the strategies used to select the five families included the structure of: Mobile military family with a sixth grade student; sixth grade student must have moved at least three times in his/her years of school; all students must be attending or have attended the same public school district with a heavy presence of active duty mobile military families; and maintain at least a ‘C’ average as determined by the letter grades taken from the school’s student management system. The second level of maximum variation will include a representation of the officer and enlisted military ranks from the installation. Of the five families, the intent was to include officer and enlisted ranks in the study. However, in sending out my request for participation, the only respondents volunteering to participate that met initial criteria of having a sixth grader that had moved at least three times, were in officer ranks. In looking at it further as to why no enlisted families volunteered, it was determined that many of the enlisted families are permanent party meaning they may remain in a location for three years or more. With this in mind, they might have been willing to participate, but they would have only two moves by sixth grade instead of the three required for this study. The third level of maximum variation in the study will be to select students, by using the district student management system, from three different academic levels (high, average, low) of performance as determined from the district’s STAR assessment and letter grades. Additionally, within the five families participating in the study, two are boys and three are girls. In summary, the five families with a sixth grade student selected through maximum variation were broken down in to three different academic levels (high, average, and low).

Within each level (high, average, and low) will be a dependent of an officer within the military. This structure provided a solid baseline for establishing specific criteria, thus keeping the focus on the consistent collection of data.

The data collected was from documents that represent stories as told by participants of preparations put in place before, during, and after the transition to a new duty station. Through analyzing the data, common narrative themes were uncovered. As stated by Flick (2009), data are first disentangled (“segmented”). Units of meaning classify expression (single words, short sequences of words) in order to attach annotations and “concepts” (codes) to them (p. 307). These stories were collected from parents in three different documents reflecting these times and spaces. Narrative stories, also synonymous in this project as a written reflection, submitted by the participating parents responding to a narrative story prompt (See Appendix A). In-depth interviews conducted as well to ascertain their children’s experiences in schools before, during, after the relocation. Parental responses to the interview questions (See Appendix B) provided input from the parents on the details of their moves from duty station to duty station. I also collected artifacts such as photographs, certificates of achievement, community involvement awards, and other special documents to provide a greater understanding of their experiences in schools. The narratives and in-depth interviews were analyzed focusing on patterns and themes that appeared in the data of the five families. The findings of the study will hopefully contribute to the knowledge base of ways to address mobility among military and non-military students in public schools.

Significance of the Study

The issue I explored is the academic performance of mobile military-connected students. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind law with federal mandate of achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), all districts and schools must focus on the academic performance levels of individual students. The U.S. Department of Education (2002) has set guidelines for academic performance of each individual. In grades three through eight and once in high school by graduation, students must take an annual assessment in reading and math. The test results are disaggregated by poverty, race, disabilities, ESL and gender to ‘ensure’ no child is left behind (p. 9). What was missing from the NCLB guidebook was a mandate addressing the transient public school student population and their academic performance. The issue of transient military public school students is even more prevalent as the student population turns over year-to-year, and even within the same year based upon the parent or guardian’s military orders, duties, and/or assignment. Wasserman (2001) wrote, “Research in school systems in the United States has shown that student mobility can affect both the students that change schools and their classmates” (p. 1). More and more, throughout the United States, many families are transient for a variety of reasons. Many of them, according to Mao, Whitsett, Maria, and Mellor (1997), “sound all too familiar, such as parental job termination, promotion or relocation transfers, marital disruption and separation, and parental death” (p. 3). The role mobility plays regarding student success is critical according to Education Week (2004), in that:

the potential impact of mobility on students’ education is significant. Students who move often between schools may experience a range of problems such as: lower achievement levels due to discontinuity of curriculum between schools; behavior problems; difficulty developing peer relationships; and greater risk for dropping out. (p. 1)

An element needed for educators to consistently and positively affect student achievement is to address the components not often thought of in regular instructional practice—student mobility is one of these aspects. While much attention has been given to the mobility of public school students and their academic performance, there is less supporting literature for mobile military children and school achievement (Newman, 1988; Wadsworth, 2011).

It is my hope, through completing this study, I may contribute to the research surrounding academic performance and the mobile military child. While there is currently a limited body of research (Ashby, 2003; Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008; Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010) my research informs families of mobile military dependents. Additionally, this research study also provides information and insight for academic performance and mobile families in public schools not related to military. The pragmatic goal of this study was to highlight the strategies mobile military families addressed to assist and support continued academic performance from duty station to duty station, as well as confirm the strategies in place are effective in addressing frequent student mobility and academic performance.

Summary

I have laid out the problem of mobility and the challenges faced by mobile military families in this chapter. Despite these challenges, mobile military students perform well academically. This study explored the strategies that may assist with continued academic performance even with frequent mobility. The stories gathered from my sample families served as rich data in this qualitative project.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature surrounding this issue is presented as a means to provide the foundational knowledge for the study that is connected to the problem,

purpose, research questions, and findings. In continuing to research literature for and around the academic performance of the mobile military-connected child, I was selective in the variables that are most important and pertinent to the research study. This allowed for a better-aligned narratological research study. The review of the literature used to guide this study related to student mobility (for both non-military and military connected populations), mobile military family student academics and supports, social learning theory, parental involvement, culture and leadership, and resiliency. The rationale used to guide this study focused on the whole mobile military-connected child and the challenges he/she may face because of frequent relocation from duty station to duty station. The inclusion of these topics has been determined through my work in a public school district in the Midwest with a high percentage of military-connected students and an annual student turnover averaging 50 percent. Each topic is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, an in-depth discussion of the methodology for this study is presented, including rationale for qualitative research, the setting for the study, participants and sampling techniques, data collection and analysis, and limitations including validity, reliability, and ethical considerations. In Chapter 4, I present the data findings using the voices of the participants. I conclude in Chapter 5 with the implications of findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon explored in this study was school mobility and academic performance within a military setting. Sufficient research exists surrounding student mobility and its impact on academic performance for non-military public school students (Cox et al., 1992; Garber, 2003; Ingersoll, 1988; Sanderson, 2003). However, there is less emphasis and research on mobility of military-connected students and their academic performance, let alone whether it has a negative impact or is considered non-impactful (Newman, 1988; Wadsworth, 2011). In this review of the literature, I construct a greater understanding of military family mobility as it relates academic performance. The function of the review of the literature is to provide a basis as to what research and studies will be utilized as a means to sufficiently serve as foundational knowledge of the study for making meaning of the data; thus, leading to meeting the purpose of the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) define conceptual framework as a written or visual product that “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts or variables – and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18). The purpose of this narratological case study was to reveal insights and any strategies that may exist within mobile military families, as they relocate from duty station to duty station, for overcoming the presumed challenges associated with transience and school performance of their children. The questions in need of answer are: (1) How do military parents describe their experiences related to family mobility? (2) What strategies do highly mobile military parents describe to assist with student academics in a variety of educational settings? (3) What support

mechanisms do military families identify to assist with mobility? and (4) What concerns would mobile military families like to see addressed for additional support in transition?

With student mobility considered a national trend in public schools, I present empirical studies discussing this trend as well as the causes or relationships associated with student mobility, with a final discussion of mobility as related to military-connected children. Mobile-military student academics, to include research-based strategies that can assist with addressing the academic needs of students, is included as part of the literature review. Exploring the experiences of mobility for the families of military-connected children, also necessitate understanding the role of resiliency in the lives of the participants' children. Children can be talented at many things and resilient with the ability to adapt to challenging situations not considered part of a child's daily routine. The challenges of childhood, compounded by the significant challenges faced by military-connected children due to factors such as parent deployment, war, injury and mobility, are a lot for most children to handle. The connection between the mobile military-connected child and the communities in which they live is significant. From the aspect of learning from those around us or even from social cues, social learning theory will be discussed as supporting academics, resiliency, and parental involvement in light of mobility. As discussed in this review of the literature, parents play a critical role in helping children overcome adversity and become academically successful in spite of challenges related to military-connectedness and frequent mobility.

To explore the literature, I have included books, journal articles, federal and state reports, and conference papers to gather relevant theories, concepts, empirical studies, both quantitative and qualitative, and my professional experiences with the phenomenon. Several data bases proved fruitful to identify relevant literature including ERIC, EBSCOhost, Google

Scholar, and in my current position as superintendent of schools with a high rate of military-connected student mobility allowed me to draw on extensive personal and professional experience with the student mobility. In researching the key terms associated with this study (student mobility, military mobility and academic performance, resiliency, parental involvement), the listing of hundreds of thousands of associated articles, books, and studies were exposed. However, after narrowing down the research and resources that will specifically contribute to literature base, I discovered that there is much less pertinent and direct research specifically surrounding the topics of military-connected student mobility and their academic performance as opposed to non-military mobility. For example, I found over 350,000 articles, books and studies referenced on Google scholar related to student mobility and academic performance, and significantly less on the topic of military-connected child mobility. The search of Google scholar for military-connected child mobility yielded 106 articles or books between the years of 1981 to present. In fact, several of the 106 articles or studies under the search for military-connected child mobility merely mentioned the military-connected child as another subgroup as opposed to contributing to the studies or research data. In the following sections student mobility, mobile military family student academics, military supports, Social Learning Theory, parental involvement, and resiliency are used to construct meaning of the phenomena and serve as the foundation knowledge of the study. As field study evolved, I realized that I needed to expand the literature review based on key findings of the study.

Student Mobility

As a means to construct the framework for this research study, I begin by exploring student mobility for non-military related populations followed by mobility within military related populations. An overview of the impact of mobility in a general sense across all students informed the study in relation to mobile military families. As referenced before, there is a considerable amount of articles, books, and studies surrounding mobile children and their academic performance as a result of the frequent moves. In the following section, I present empirical data related to this non-military transient population.

Student Mobility for Non-Military Related Populations

Non-Military mobility is widely seen as an issue for students and schools across the country. One-fifth or 20 percent of our population is considered mobile or transient for a variety of reasons (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 1994). These frequent moves can be within the same city, county, state, or even state-to-state. The impact of frequent moves on the student and the school, especially with the federally mandated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in which schools and district must meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or face penalty, can significantly impact the achievement and learning environment for the receiving school or classroom as well as the mobile student. According to the GAO (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 1994) report, “About 17 percent of all third graders – more than a half million – have changed schools frequently, attending three or more schools since first grade” (p. 4). The report continued with “41 percent of these frequent school changes were below grade level in reading and 33 percent were below grade level in math, compared with 26 percent and 17 percent, respectively, of student who had never changed schools” (p. 4). As stated by Barton and Coley (2009),

A change in schools can mean that a student faces work he or she is not prepared for, a teacher who is not likely to be familiar with the student's prior learning, and an environment in which the student has to deal with being an outsider who has to make all new friends. (p. 20)

The implications for the child of changing schools multiple times, or even within the same year or same district/system can have lasting negative effects on academic progress and social integration into student groups that have been previously established prior to the new student's arrival. The GAO discussed by Kerbow, Azcoitia, and Buell (2003), factors associated with student mobility do not always relate to residential moves but also include school-related factors such as district boundary changes, discipline in suspension and expulsion, overcrowding, safety concerns and limited academic course offerings or programs (p. xi). The Census Bureau data provided below provides the reasons for moving for all movers in 2002 to 2003 by specific category. The significance of this chart presents each category of movers, in an effort to illustrate the most common reasons for mobility (Figure 2). For a non-military mobile family, the most common reason for moving is housing related among all movers and categories by percentage in 2002 to 2003. If a chart of this nature was available for reasons military relocate, I assert the highest percentage reason would likely be work-related reasons under the subcategory of job transfer.

Reasons for Moving by Type of Move: 2002 to 2003 (Movers, 1 year and older)				
Reason	All movers	Intracounty	Intercounty	Fromabroad
Total movers (thousands).....	40,093	23,468	15,356	1,269
Percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Family-related reasons.....	26.3	24.7	28.5	29.4
Change in marital status.....	6.7	6.4	7.1	5.9
To establish own household.....	7.0	8.8	4.5	4.6
Other family reasons.....	12.6	9.5	16.8	19.0
Work-related reasons.....	15.6	6.0	28.3	38.1
New job/job transfer.....	8.8	1.7	18.6	22.6
To look for work/lost job.....	1.9	0.7	3.0	9.0
Closer to work/easier commute.....	3.2	2.9	3.9	0.2
Retired.....	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.6
Other job-related reason.....	1.4	0.6	2.4	5.7
Housing-related reasons.....	51.3	65.3	33.5	8.8
Wanted to own home/not rent.....	10.2	12.7	7.1	0.5
New/better house/apartment.....	19.8	26.2	11.3	4.5
Better neighborhood/less crime.....	3.8	4.7	2.7	0.5
Cheaper housing.....	6.5	8.2	4.5	0.6
Other housing.....	11.0	13.5	7.8	2.7
Other reasons.....	6.8	3.9	9.9	23.7
Attend/leave college.....	2.5	1.1	4.2	9.1
Change of climate.....	0.4	0.0	1.0	0.5
Health reasons.....	1.4	1.1	2.0	0.9
Other reason.....	2.5	1.8	2.7	13.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement

Figure 2. Reasons for Moving by Type of Move:
2002 to 2003 (Movers, 1 year and older)

Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy (1999) provide research on California school-aged students ranging from Kindergarten through High School using a mixed methodology that consisted of quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from interviews and detailed several factors considered in mobility. This study utilized data from parents, students and schools as part of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). The participants were 8th graders through high school students interviewed and surveyed over a six-year period of

time between 1988 and 1994. The intent of this study was to gather information on the nature of mobility in students in California and identify specific causes and consequences of this mobile problem (Rumberger et al., 1999). A named limitation focused on the NELS data and concerns with “attrition from the NELS panel” with only 60% of the base respondents tracked over the six-year period (p. 9). Specific to the quantitative survey data, discussions and interviews with parents and students were regarded as whether the moves were “strategic” or “reactive” in nature (p. 72). Rumberger et al. (1999) revealed that the reasons for changing schools could be classified in to two types: “reactive moves, which were unplanned moves made in reaction to some situation in the family or school, and strategic moves, which were purposeful, planned moves made to achieve some desired end, like a better home, school or community situation” (p. 72). This study by Rumberger et al. (1999) of California was a study of the perspective from two groups, students and the schools. The student perspective included family inputs, while the school perspective included the schools and classrooms (p. 3).

In reviewing the results of the study, there was conclusive data to suggest student-initiated school changes were reactive in nature and related to situations or issues encountered. In relating race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status to the California study, Rumberger et al. (1999) state the mobility rates among ethnic groups did not vary (grades 8-12), but there was a significant difference in mobility rates related to income and socioeconomic groups (p. 24). As determined by the California study of over 11,000 students and compared nationally, the mobility problem in California is not just considered a move for residential purposes, but also reactive to situations as opposed to strategic for job, or promotion or better schools.

Income and socio-economic status continue to be challenges for education or more importantly for children of poverty. With the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Barr and Parrett (2007) state the most challenging aspect of leaving no child behind is “teaching the underachieving children of poverty” (p. 21). Barr and Parrett (2007) describe the parents of these children of poverty of having little education and doing what they can to make ends meet, which may include working several low-paying jobs. “They are often without adequate health care, nutrition, housing, and clothing” (p. 21). Children of poverty typically end up in schools or districts that have fewer financial resources than their neighboring affluent districts, as well as less-qualified teachers with a less-challenging curriculum. The results end with more frequent retention rates, tracking, higher rates of special education identification, and frequent in-school suspensions or detention because of behavior issues (Barr & Parrett, 2007; Haberman, 1995).

As illustrated in the Columbus Public Schools (CPS) Student Mobility Research Project Report conducted by The Columbus Foundation (Garber, 2003), “student mobility rates, particularly in large urban school districts, can vary by race and family income” (p. 4-1). Kerbow (1996) contends, “In Chicago, African American students represented 75 percent of the highly mobile (4+ moves) student population and 53 percent of the stable student population. The pattern was reversed for white, Latino, and Asians, who comprised larger percentages of the most stable group than of the most mobile group” (p. 8). More recent trend data from De La Torre and Gwynne (2009) completing a research project for the Consortium on Chicago School Research called *Changing Schools: A Look at Student Mobility Trends in Chicago Public Schools Since 1995* give statistics on mobility by ethnicity over several years. They state,

In 2000, African American elementary had an in-mobility rate of 15.9 percent; the rate for Latinos, whites, and Asians was approximately 13 percent. By 2005, the in-mobility rate for African American students increased to 18.9 percent; it was around 11 percent for white and Asian students, and 12.7 percent for Latino students. (p. 20)

There is a larger mobility rate among high school students in Chicago as compared to elementary, which is not limited to students changing schools within district but also moving out of the city. Both in-district and out of district moves by students can disrupt the learning environment not only for the student but the schools. In Chapter 1 of this study, I briefly introduced the CPS study as an introduction to the reader on ‘mover’ and non-mover’ trends from the commissioned study (Garber, 2003). In an effort to connect the significance of the CPS data to the impact of mobility, I provide additional empirical data from the study to expand the understanding and effects. The Columbus Foundation (2003) explains what Kerbow (1996) has described as a number of changes in instruction resulting in schools with high mobility rates:

- 1) teachers find long-term planning and assessment difficult;
- 2) instruction becomes more generic (rather than focusing on the specific composition of the class) in response to a constantly-changing student body; and
- 3) teachers spend more time on review and slow down the pace of instruction to accommodate new students. (pp. 4-3, 4-4)

The impact of mobility on academic achievement can be cumulative over time. In the CPS study, 80% of the mobile students were economically disadvantaged compared to 64% of the non-movers being children of poverty. In 2002, the Columbus Foundation commissioned Community Research Partners (CRP) to study the causes of high mobility in the Linden-McKinley feeder pattern and to recommend strategies for both schools and the community that can assist with improving the current trend in mobility and academic impact (p. 1-3).

The CPS quantitative study included family surveys, census data, review of student records, and key informant interviews. In 2002, there were 5,078 students enrolled in one of the 12 Linden-McKinley schools in grades kindergarten through twelve. Within these schools is a student demographic of which a high percentage is African-American with a low percentage of white students, to include a high percentage of overall students eligible for free or reduced lunch pricing (p. 2-6). In the CPS study, Garber (2003) stated the mobile 4th graders' reading test passage rate decreased as the number of moves increased. The CPS non-mover group had a passage rate that was ten to nearly twenty percentage points higher than all mover groups (p. ii). A number of studies have concluded that mobile students achieved less than non-mobile students in academics and attendance (Kerbow, 1996; Rumberger, 1999). If a student changes schools one time there is a likelihood that he/she will not experience continuous academic difficulties as compared to student who have multiple moves in their educational career.

Xu, Hannaway, and D'Souza (2009) present data from a longitudinal study on transience and student academic outcomes in math. They assert, "regardless of underlying reasons for a school change, student school mobility itself will have a direct impact on academic outcomes" (p. 4). Students will face adjustment challenges socially, psychologically, and academically while integrating into a new school or system of which the effects will be compounded with multiple moves (Xu et al., 2009). The study used "descriptive analysis on the prevalence and time trends of mobility as well as estimating mobility effects using fixed-effects models and estimating among different student groups" (p. 8). The dependent variables were reading and math gains in end-of-year North Carolina assessments. The North Carolina Department of Instruction (NCDI) collected the data used

in the analysis. Xu et al. (2009) reported math scores were negatively impacted due to mobility for other than non-promotional moves. Additionally, there was a negative impact on school mobility to African American, Hispanic, and low-income students, but no effect for white students and non-poor students. The data also showed the loss of achievement in math was three times as large in special education students as opposed to those not identified with special needs (p. 23).

Because of the trend data related to mobility and academic performance, schools can attempt to decrease transience in these highly mobile communities by creating an environment that is safe, conducive to learning, and provides family supports through communication and involvement. There is additional need by schools to be prepared for differentiation of instruction to meet all learners' needs regardless of when they enroll or arrive at school. The significance of multiple school changes through a student's educational career can have long-standing negative impacts on the baseline or basic skills necessary for sustained and continued success academically.

Mobility Within Military Student Populations

Comparatively to student mobility of kids that do not have a parent or parents in the military, are mobile military family students. In a GAO (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011) report to Congressional Committees it was stated:

Roughly 1.1 million school-age children in the United States are military dependents with parents in the armed forces. The majority of these students are estimated to attend public schools. Military dependent children often move multiple times throughout their school careers and sometimes have a parent absent due to deployment, creating unique challenges for their school districts. (p. 1)

The challenges faced by the mobile military-connected children are not limited to those challenges or struggles for children of non-military mobile families. Deployment of the soldier (a parent) is one factor or major challenge not experienced by non-military public school students. Ingram (2014) conducted a study on the achievement outcomes of sixth grade military-connected children. Of the 30 participants, 10 had a military parent deployed to a war zone; 10 had a military parent not deployed; and ten parents with no military affiliation all of which attended the same elementary school for third through sixth grade. The measures used were the Nebraska sixth grade end-of-year assessments (p. 35). From this study, it was concluded there was no statistical significance in academic performance in reading, math, and writing between the 20 military-connected children and the 10 whose parents had no military affiliation (pp. 61-71). To this end, the overall achievement percentile rank scores indicated the educational well being for these students of military families was being met and was reflected in measured proficiency requiring student's day-to-day engagement at school and support at home.

Additionally, as I have experienced in my school district, other challenges include but are not limited to: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) of the soldier as well as the spouse and children; wartime injury; and even loss of life of the parent. As a response to the lasting effects of continued combat each school district serving military children now has the assistance of School Liaison Officers (SLO's) for transition questions, information, and guidance prior to arriving to their new duty station, while they are housed at their location or prior to moving to their next military assignment. This has proven to be effective for communication and services for all members of the mobile military family including the student(s). The data behind the number of mobile military children that was quoted above as

“roughly 1.1 million” is stated as a vague number specifically because of the incomplete data of these mobile military families. Those that are not included in the numbers are those of homeschooled military students. As has been shared with me in my community, mobile military families sometimes choose to homeschool their children because of poor education at or near their assigned duty station; they know they’ll be moving again very soon (sometimes as soon as ten months in one location); or a parental choice for a consistent educational program because of the frequent moves. In my district alone, there are over 100 homeschooled children that have registered with the state for their own charter to homeschool. In discussions I’ve had with some families that have chosen to homeschool their child(ren) in lieu of enrolling them in my district, they’ve said it is because they’ll be moving at odd times of the year and the parents don’t want to create a situation where their child must integrate in to a new school, learn a new curriculum, and establish themselves in such a short period of time. On a national level, because of the memberships I have to various federally impacted associations that deal primarily with military connected children, I’ve been involved with meetings and conversations in which many structures and data gathering are being established to get a greater understanding of how many mobile military-connected children there currently are as opposed to having rough estimates.

Mobile Military Family Student Academics and Supports

Mobility within military families is considered an expected way of life for our active duty soldiers’ families. The frequency of the mobility from duty station to duty station, whether inside the continental United States (ConUS) or outside the continental United States (OConUS), is determinant on the needs for the specific soldier’s area(s) of training. As in other professions, there are different jobs or areas of expertise within the military.

Depending on the branch of the military or assigned field of expertise, a soldier may be assigned to specific military installations based on job assignment, skill or required training for that job. Mobile military family is defined as a parent or parents, one of which is active duty military, which by way of military service, is required to move from duty station to duty station as assigned. Within the family's make-up is the spouse (in most cases) and dependents, or children. The children must adapt to the new educational setting (if school-aged), the curriculum, the overall academics, and the existing social environment already established prior to arrival in the new location. Geographic mobility has been a long-standing aspect of American life even outside of a military relocation. Movers are of all ages and family makeup. As noted by Schachter (2001), between March 1999 and March 2000, 43.4 million Americans moved. "Over half (56 percent) of these moves were local (within the same county), 20 percent were between counties in the same state, and 19 percent were moves to a different state, with only 4 percent coming from abroad" (p. 1). Not only are the transient students adapting to a new school but the receiving school is also adapting to the new student and his/her academic levels as compared to the rest of the classes current levels of instruction. Many classroom teachers or school district administrators would agree there are great difficulties related to creating a smooth transition for mobile students within a classroom and school setting. Upon their arrival, assuming you knew in advance (which isn't always the case), preparations for classroom must be made regarding seating, textbooks, materials, etc., even as minor as a nametag for the desk depending on the age. At the administrative level, items such as school records, health records, transcripts, and contact/emergency information are all necessary for in-processing. The United States General Accountability Office (GAO), under the Health, Education, and Human Services

Division, reported in 1994 that generally schools must place children without records. The need to place students without records is manifested by the late arrival of official (or unofficial) school records when a student needs to be immediately placed. A timely receipt of school records would assist in student placement (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 1994).

The curriculum of a school district, as related to other districts can be quite different, even if they are in the same state. In some cases, schools within the same district may have varying strengths and weaknesses within the curriculum related to the staff and instructional methods used. When new students are introduced to such a varying curriculum and instruction because of a school change or multiple changes, the likelihood of prominent academic difficulties in achievement are increased. Whether associated with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or as related to a state's education department adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other state approved curriculum standards, it is still allowable for local school board determination of curriculum and resources within the constraints as set forth nationally or within the state regulations. According to Conley (2013), "the Common Core State Standards are in many respects the culmination of twenty years of standards-based education dating back to the early 1900's" (p. 141). As important as the term curriculum is in education, definitions are widely different across states, districts and even educators. For the purpose of this study, curriculum integration is used synonymously with the term curriculum. Curriculum integration as defined by Beane (1997) means,

A curriculum design that is concerned with enhancing the possibilities for personal and social integration through the organization of curriculum around significant problems and issues, collaboratively identified by educators and young people, without regard for subject-area boundaries. (p. x-xi)

In essence, the curriculum (integration) is the guide for helping the learner progress through a specific determined set of requirements. The standards/objectives are what is to be taught, while curriculum resources and materials are those that assist and enhance the learning of those standards. Not only is this important for each grade level, but also aligning the curriculum for instructional continuity is essential. Carter (2007) states Total Instructional Alignment means “making sure that what we teach, how we teach, and what we assess are congruent” (p. 22). In an effort to bring comparison between non-military public school students and mobile military-connected students, one must understand the dynamics of instructional alignment and curriculum integration for a transient population verses one that is not. For a non-military student who remains in the same school [and many times the same school system their entire elementary through high school years] it can be assumed a level of comfort and understanding will be in place with the curriculum taught to all students [unless the district itself decides to make changes, which in fact will impact all students consistently with the newness]. However, a mobile military-connected student that may move one to 10+ times prior to graduating high school will experience a new curriculum, varied instructional alignment, and possible different instructional strategies for teaching content. In my experiences, mobile military-connected students are at a disadvantage when their military relocation also changes the academic standards and curriculum they’ve worked with at each previous duty station. As states consider adopting and implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), mobile military-connected students will be on a level playing field because the intent of the CCSS is for college and career readiness with a national level of exposure to consistent standards. Oppositional state governments to the CCSS assert to

promote local or state control instead of what seems to surround the CCSS by way of Federal mandates for curriculum standards. Ultimately, common standards and educational objectives by which to teach consistently to students of like grades/ages make the most sense. In the end, it comes down to effective teaching. As stated by Gay (2010), teaching is most effective when “ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students are included in its implementation” (p. 22).

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Differentiated Instruction

Significant to the discussion of academic achievement as related to student mobility to, is culturally responsive pedagogy. Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) describe a culturally responsive classroom where “effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported, learning-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement” (p. 64). Howard (2012) expands the definition of culturally responsive pedagogy in that it manifests a “professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that supersedes mundane teaching acts, but is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, their families, their communities, and an unyielding commitment to see student success become more of a reality”(pp. 1-2). This expanded definition and rich description of a culturally responsive instructional setting transcends the typical classroom culture to allow for individuality as well as differentiated and personal instruction. The relationship between culturally responsive teaching and differentiated instruction is best described because each of them relies heavily on the student as an individual; whether that is culturally/ethnically related or academic in nature, the conceptual parallels of both culturally responsive teaching and differentiated

instruction maintain individuals as the overarching focal point. Schlein and Chan (2012) discuss cross-cultural interactions within diverse settings through the context of their research of seventh graders at Bay Street School, in which they participated with students, the homeroom teacher, other teachers and administration compiling text, informal interviews and self-reflective texts (p. 110). They infused themselves within ‘Williams’ seventh grade classroom to “investigate how students related to each other when classmates represented many cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds” (p. 115). In a diverse curricular landscape, Schlein and Chan (2012) wondered how students “made sense of themselves and each other” (p. 115). They also wondered, “how a diverse classroom shapes students’ understanding of cultural differences and contributes to their willingness to interact with students from different backgrounds” (p. 115). It was understood the limitations of their study centered on adult university-level researchers and teenage adolescents who may have a different cultural or linguistic communication style or understanding, which could be considered vulnerabilities within the study (p. 120). However, the consistent conceptual basis between culturally responsive teaching, cross-cultural interactions, and differentiated instruction provide a framework in exposing the challenges facing public school classrooms. These challenges are ever present with new students whether military or non-military.

When new students are introduced in to a new setting or new school, whether at the natural start of a school year or while it’s already underway, many factors must be considered at the initial introductions to allow for the greatest success in the new environment. The most important factor to consider is determining the academic level of the new student(s) for proper instruction and academic growth. This task takes time and resources to accomplish. But without taking effective professional care of the situation, there is risk, as educators, of

misplacing or negatively impacting the academic progress of students. In order to positively impact the academics of transient students new to a school, a system of differentiated instruction must be successfully in place. Differentiated instruction, as defined by Hall (2002), means to “recognize students varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, interests, and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class” (p. 1).

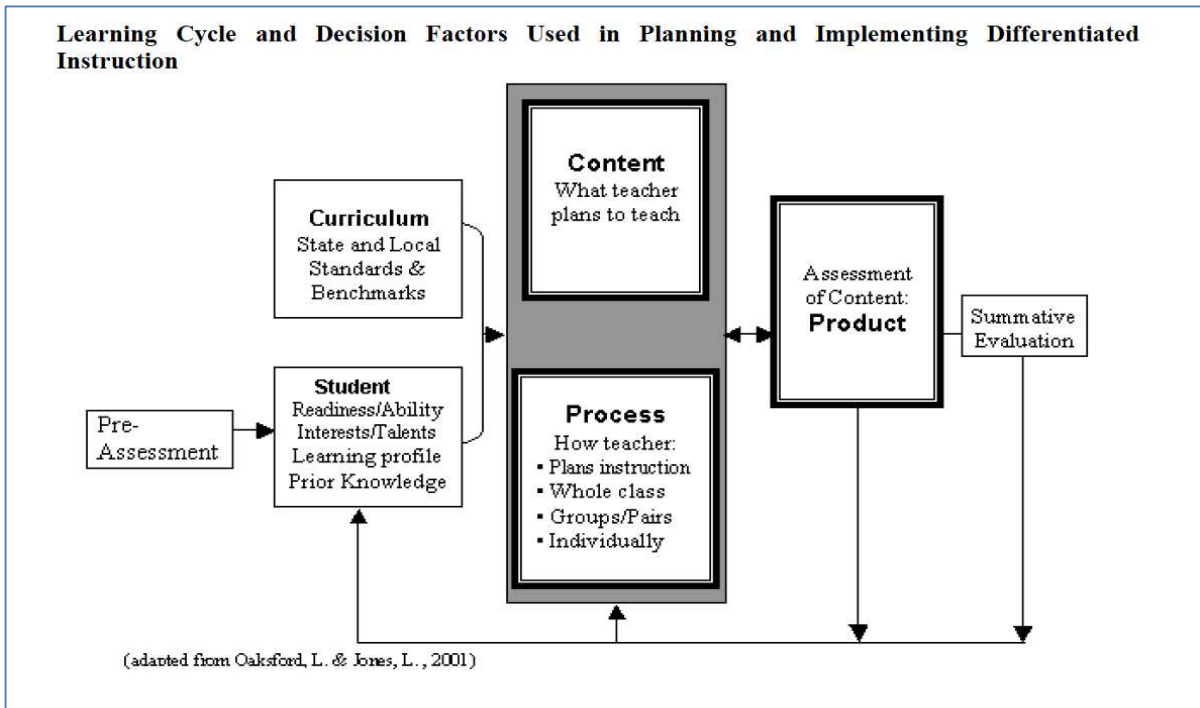


Figure 3. Learning Cycle and Decision Factors Used in Planning and Implementing Differentiated Instruction

Figure 3 from Hall (2002) depicts the areas of content, process and product that can be differentiated in the curriculum through the evaluation process where data is gathered to make continued decisions of instructional and academic needs. The designed systematic approach from pre-assessment through summative evaluation of the individual student is the gauge by which the instructional staff can assess mastery of content and if the student is ready to proceed on to the next learning objective. When a school/district empowers the students through differentiation and individuality of ability and strengths, it is a win-win for all involved. It is not as simple as just saying a student's academics will be differentiated, but rather difficult because of the changing needs of each student. If a school/district truly intends to individualize for the students whether mobile or not, it is crucial to have data that

supports where students are performing at academically. From this data, individualized instruction can be structured and focused. With a differentiated classroom instruction style in place the focus is on the individual learner and his/her needs for academic growth.

According to Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), in an effectively differentiated classroom, it is understood that:

- Students differ as learners in terms of background experience, culture, language, gender, interests, readiness to learn, modes of learning, speed of learning, support systems for learning, self-awareness as a learner, confidence as a learner, independence as a learner, and a host of other ways.
- Differences profoundly impact how students learn and the nature of scaffolding they will need at various points in the learning process.
- Teachers have a responsibility to ensure that all of their students master important content
- Teachers have to make specific and continually evolving plans to connect each learner with the key content.
- Teachers are required to understand the nature of each of their students, in addition to the nature of the content they teach.
- A flexible approach to teaching, “makes room” for student variance.
- Teachers should continually ask, “What does *this* student need at *this* moment in order to be able to progress with *this* key content, and what do I need to do to make this happen?” (p. 14)

In order for mobile students to benefit from a classroom that is set up for differentiation, the ability to assess the child for academic baseline shortly after he/she arrives is critical. The classroom educator may have very little information regarding the school or educational setting the mobile student just came from. This is exceptionally the case regarding mobile military-connected children, by which their family relocations may be from across the country or even from a different country at varying times during the school year.

Assessments are a method to gain knowledge of the academic levels of the mobile student(s). The assessment data can be summative and formative. Summative assessments,

by definition happen at the end or as a summary. However formative assessments, as defined by Buffum, Matos, and Weber (2009), “are diagnostic progress-monitoring tools that are used to adjust teaching and learning while they are still occurring” (p. 77). Just as it is important to follow the data, it is important to focus on what to teach, i.e. the curriculum. While there is autonomy to differentiate for a student’s individualized needs, the state adopted standards are the required objectives at each level that are necessary for incremental learning at each level. According to Schmoker (2011), the powerful strategies needed for all students’ instruction are “adequate amounts of essential subject-area content, concepts, and topics; Intellectual/thinking skills and authentic literacy – purposeful reading, writing, and discussion as the primary modes of learning both content and thinking skills” (p. 26). As a former teacher of First Grade and Fifth Grade as well as building principal (prior to my current role as a district level administrator), my instructional focus for students to master the essential outcomes of learning standards was through classroom based learning centers, projects, and challenge-based learning. Classroom learning centers are effective for differentiation regardless of the grade level. Each learning center (generally 4-5) is developed from the available curriculum resources to meet the required learning objectives. The centers I used were subject based, as in science/social studies, writing, mathematics, computers/technology, and language arts. During the time at centers, by which all students would cycle through each center during the week, I was also able to have a small rotating group of learners with me focusing on skills and objectives individualized to their needs, thus differentiating their instruction in the needed subjects. Young (2013) describes this individualized teaching pedagogy as what teachers do and what they get their students to do, with teaching depending on “both the knowledge teachers have of their subject, the

knowledge that they have about individual pupils and how they learn—and the knowledge that informs what they require their pupils to do” (p. 111).

For projects in the classroom, designs were again made from the curriculum with learning objectives as the overarching concept. A rubric was established so students understand the requirements, and a timeline was set for completion. Classroom projects may involve cross-curricular elements in design to accommodate the array of subject matter in the curriculum standards. The projects should be an in-depth study to engage the learner and provide a deep understanding of the topic of study or the challenge-based learning objective. Challenge-based learning is exactly what it sounds like...learning from real-world challenges. As defined by Johnson, Smith, Smythe, and Varon (2009), challenge-based learning is a model that incorporates contextual teaching and learning while focusing on real world problems (p. 7). Challenge-based learning must excite the students and “create a sense of curiosity”; provide access to “21st century tools”; utilize real-world current events and scenarios; and provide a basis for collaboration and self-paced completion of the challenge (p. 8). These problems are real-life scenarios designed to have a loose structure and no single right answer. There are parameters by which to follow but are investigative in nature for the challenge in which they are working. An example of a challenge-based learning project could relate to water conservation or recycling. Just in those two topics alone, one can understand the many directions and applications students can study and practice while completing the challenge. The three previous strategies, as in centers, projects and challenges, support a classroom teacher’s need for differentiation of student learning. I assert these strategies (though more modern in nature) venture historically to the traditions in educational approach and theory of Dewey. Dewey (1904) contends “the student who has

acquired power in psychological observation and interpretation may finally go on to observe more technical aspects of instruction, namely, the various methods and instrumentalities used by a good teacher in giving instruction in any subject” (p. 14). I interpret Dewey to provide groundwork for collaboration, observation and varied methods of instruction. Young (2013) contends “curriculum theory and, therefore, the curriculum must start not from the student as learner but from a student’s entitlement or access to knowledge” (p. 107). Instructional strategies and educational theories for best-practices, no matter how complex or detail-oriented, may not always address all challenges faced in schools, especially when related to student mobility.

High student mobility puts enormous stress on schools. Ascher (1991) states, “One of the biggest administrative, and therefore pedagogical, problems with mobile students stems from the lack of prompt transfer of records. Students...may be held back, while their receiving school waits three to five months for their records” (p. 3). But what must be included with these numbers of mobile students/families are those from active duty military families.

The students from these mobile military families either attend schools run by the Department of Defense Education Activity agency (DoDEA) or by civilian schools near military installations. Within DoDEA, according to Fruchter (2007), “some 227 DoDEA

elementary and secondary schools located here and abroad serve approximately 102,000 students” (p. 19). Fruchter (2007) continues, “students of color constitute approximately 40% of the enrollment in DoDEA schools, and children of enlisted personnel make up 80%. Approximately 50% of all DoDEA students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Student mobility in DoDEA schools is at 35%” (p. 19). From discussions with my counterparts across the country who work in civilian schools serving military, the numbers of children of military personnel that attend civilian schools near military bases in the continental United States is on the rise, exceeding 800,000. The rise in numbers relates to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and Global Rebasing of the military in bringing troops back to the United States from other countries. Lepore et al. (2013) in a GAO report to Congressional Committees, reported total BRAC actions for 2005 (to be executed by 2011) totaling 813. That is more than double the total actions from 1988 to 2005. Included in the BRAC actions are the categories of Major Base Closures; Major Realignments; Minor Closure and Realignment; and Total Actions (p. 29). In my school district of nearly 1,900 students in grades Kindergarten through Ninth grade, 94% of the students are children of active duty military. Fruchter (2007) discussed the 35% student mobility rate in DoDEA schools as “quite high”, where in my district it is consistently above 50% sometimes reaching 60% student turnover annually. With the military structures and security and focus on discipline, on-post students or students from military families adapt well and focus on education.

In a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to Congressional Committee (2011), the biggest challenge for school districts [from the GAO survey] that

educate children of military families is the difference in curriculum and academic standards (p. 20). The report continued,

Forty-one percent of school districts rated increased academic needs due to differences in curricula between districts and/or states as extremely or very challenging, and 32 percent said it was moderately challenging. States use different curricula and have different graduation and academic standards and assessment practices, sometimes making it difficult for a receiving school to integrate new students. (p. 20)

Within the GAO study (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011), it was found there were few studies related to the academic and behavioral impact of mobility specifically. National student achievement data was also not available for mobile-military students causing difficulty for a specific link between achievement and mobility (p. 20). Mobility is not the only challenge to military-connected children. Though frequent moves from duty station to duty station can be considered a common challenge for military families, these can also be viewed as an adventure or new opportunity as well. One significant challenge, not viewed as positive or easy to handle, is when a parent is gone for an extended period of time most often to a war-zone or combat mission. This is considered a deployment for the active duty soldier.

Deployments of soldiers in my school district have ranged from 12 months to over 18 months. Military families, while sometimes assigned to a new duty station, may also be deployed to a war zone. According to Chandra et al. (2011) speaking to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, “since 2001, the United States has deployed approximately two million service members to support these operations” (p. xiii). Multiple deployments and in many cases back-to-back deployments offers little quality time at home. There is only a small body of

research surrounding the effects of deployment on the family and thusly the children and their academics. They further state,

School Personnel see parental deployments as affecting the ability of children to function at school. According to school personnel, although many students were able to address the challenges introduced from parental deployment, there were others who were struggling with these periods of separation. Staff in the focus groups and interviews felt that student uncertainty about deployment length increased stress at home, and the perceived mental health issues of their non-deployed parent contributed to difficulties functioning at school. Furthermore, families had an additional challenge in that they often lacked a support network within their school that understood the military experience. (p. 3)

My experiences as a teacher, administrator and now superintendent of a highly mobile military school district provide insight to the positive and negative aspects the children encounter due to frequent relocation. The more deployments a family experiences, the more difficult the transitions back in to a family setting, school setting, and community setting. In a study by Richardson et al. (2011), in analyzing data from North Carolina and Washington, D.C. because of their large military posts and students impacted by parental deployment, discovered “a modest, consistent, negative relationship between cumulative months deployed and academic outcomes across two states and two subjects examined” (p. 16). They continue, “there appears to be a threshold whereby children experiencing cumulative parental deployments of 19 months or more score significantly lower on achievement tests compared to those experiencing less cumulative parental deployments” (p. 18). As the military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, soldiers are experiencing multiple deployments with a shortened break in between. Figure 4 illustrates the data of parental deployment statistics within the Army, North Carolina, and Washington.

Parental Deployment Statistics			
2007	Total Army	North Carolina	Washington
N (soldier)	1.1 million		
N (child)		13,966	3,066
Total sample:			
Ever deployed (%)	51	74	67
Deployed in the past year (%)		42	35
Is deployed currently (%)	16	23	22
Among those who have deployed:			
One deployment (%)	63	48	59
Two deployments (%)	37	28	31
Three or more deployments (%)		23	10
Number of deployments since 2001 (mean)		1.9	1.6
Months deployed since 2001 (mean)		13.1	13

Figure 4. Parental Deployment Statistics.

Sources: Total Army Data from Dept. of Defense (2007); deployed Army pop. Data from DMDC as cited in IOM (2010)

The above data represents 13,966 soldiers in North Carolina and 3,066 soldiers from Washington, D.C. Of those numbers, nearly two-thirds were active duty soldiers with the other one-third representing Army National Guard and Army Reserves. Additionally from the sample there was roughly one officer for every five to seven enlisted soldiers, which is consistent among deployed soldiers as well as the army as a whole (Richardson et al., 2011). In my district, many of the soldiers have been deployed two to three times (and in some cases more) since 2001, reporting that after their ten-month assignment to the post where my school district is, they will again deploy back in to a war zone or combat. With the

deployment of a parent/guardian, the student may see increased stress at home due to additional household duties (chores) and the absence of the parent/guardian. This stress can be cause for lower completion of homework and absences related to emotion and stress. Since the beginning of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, by which soldiers have experienced multiple deployments, there have been few studies assessing the impact of deployment on test scores of military children. Sheppard et al. (2010) reference only two studies conducted identifying that students had a negative result on test scores while a parent was deployed. They found significant decreases in test scores in most subject areas with longer deployments also having an impact. They also reported scores dropped significantly if the deployment was during the month of test administration (p. 599). An additional factor, not often discussed because there is little research available due to the newness of its effects, is that of difficulties of reintegration when the deployed parent returns. Chandra et al. (2010) assert the reintegration when a service member returns is also a difficult period as was the challenge of the deployment when they left. The students generally would be excited for the return home, but often there were challenges by way of new family dynamics created when the parent was gone. With the return of the parent comes the need to contend with relating to the parent again since they've been gone. Additionally, if there are any physical, emotional, or mental changes that occurred that is another level of adjustment to contend with (p. 4). These factors, as are reported by staff in my school district, have an impact on the overall academic and behavioral performance of students. Continued exposure to mobility as a family and stress related to the multiple moves in a child's educational career could have lasting and long-term effects on student academic performance and their ability to achieve academically in the presence of multiple challenges. With the known challenges associated

with the mobile military, there are known resources available to deal with each aspect or issue from the soldier or family.

Military Supports

I have often heard in my current capacity, a common and recurring statement among the military community in that when one person joins, the whole family serves. Making the choice to be a soldier in one of the branches of military is choosing a new way of life. In saying this, the soldier prepares to defend our country whether here on American soil or abroad due to military assignment. Choosing this way of life, whether as a single soldier, married, and/or married with children, the decision must be part of a bigger picture of flexibility and supports. The military have supports in place not only for the family but also for the children of military while transitioning from duty station to duty station. Not all military dependent students will live on an active installation as they transition. Many times, they will be enrolled in the public school system nearest the military installation. Assistance is provided to military families by their service branch. According to the guide *Students at the Center: A Resource for Military Families, Military Leaders and School Leaders*, which was co-created by the Department of Defense of Education Activity (DoDEA) and the Collaborative Communications Group (2010), there are a host of programs to support military connected children towards academic success (p. 36). The guide shares information on programs to include family centers on each installation, tutoring programs, community partnerships, before and after school services and physical/mental health supports. Additionally, upon arrival connecting with the installation officers and staff in charge of transitions will help families (pp. 36-37). The guide also provides specific resources available to help military-connected families and children in academic success:

Family Centers [also called, Fleet and Family Support Centers, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Centers, or Army Community Service Centers]; National Guard and Reserve support specialists; School Liaison Officers (SLO's); Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children; Services for Children with Special Needs [such as Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), Special Needs Organizational Record (SCOR), Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP), Yellow Pages for Kids with Disabilities.]; Psychological Health Resources; and Supplemental Academic Support. (pp. 36-38)

Within the sample list provided above, while it seems extensive, may only be as effective as are the supports in place in the school system the children attend. De Pedro et al. (2011) provide relevant research on military-connected children and military-connected schools. While they did not find empirical studies related to strategies civilian public schools have in place for military connected children during war and deployment (p. 606), their analysis generated four themes in which to categorize the literature: “mental health, child maltreatment, military-specific life events (deployment, reintegration, and war-related trauma), and the experiences of Reservist and national Guard Families” (p. 606).

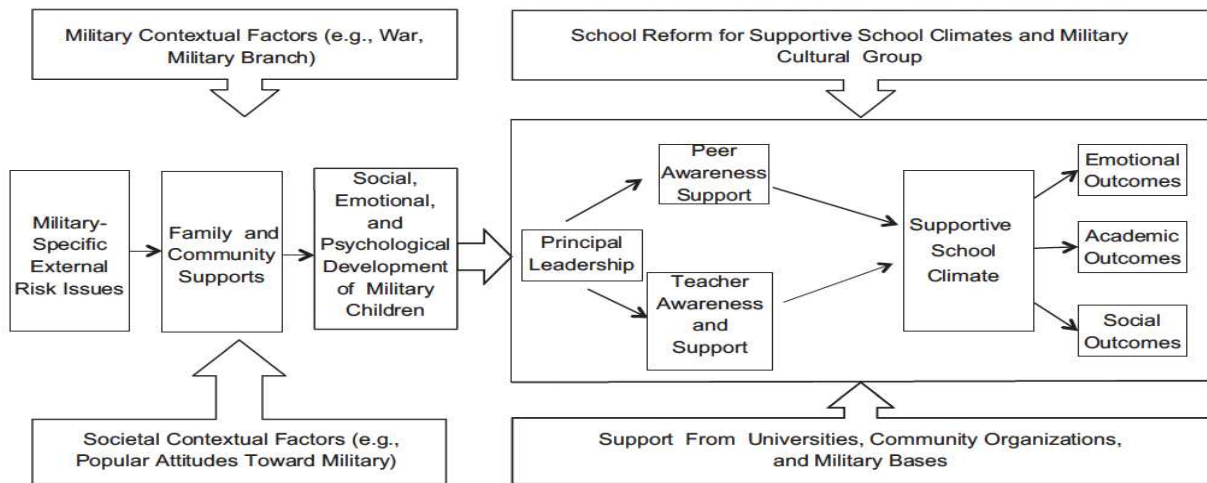


Figure 5. Current and Future Directions in Education Research on Military Children

Figure 5 depicts the current and future direction in educational research on military children (De Pedro, 2011). The flow chart in Figure 5 above illustrates all the aspects in an organizational chart for the components that must be considered when working with or in educating military-connected children attending local public schools on/near military installations. The chart takes into account risk factors, support systems, school staffing, climate and projected outcomes. As stated by De Pedro et al. (2011) this research, “focuses mainly on factors pertaining to experiences or risk factors of being in a military family, coping and supportive family dynamics, and the effects of these risk factors on the child’s social and emotional development” (p. 606). In my professional experiences, there are certain military family supports that have and continue to be most beneficial to mobile military-connected children. One of these is the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Interstate Compact, as stated on the MIC3 website, was developed by The Council of State Governments’ National Center for Interstate

Compacts, the Department of Defense, national associations, federal and state officials, departments of education, school administrators, and military families. With military moving duty stations typically every one to three years, the challenges this presents over the academic experiences of the children could be numerous. For example, the Interstate Compact allows mobile military-connected students in high school to not be delayed in graduation due to transition from one state high school to another. In many states, state history is required as a graduation requirement. If a student transfers to Kansas their senior year and has not taken Kansas History, but has taken California history at their previous location, this will count towards graduation requirements not delaying course completion (Jacobson & Benbenishty, 2012). Additionally, aspects such as kindergarten age of entry, sharing of student records, student placement, on-time graduation, and participation in extra-curricular activities will not be hindered because of transition from duty station to duty station (one state high school to a different state's high school). The Interstate Compact's true intent is to avoid any penalties to the mobile military-connected child because of the responsibilities and relocation of active duty military families and soldiers (Jacobson & Benbenishty, 2012).

Mobility for military-connected children is difficult enough with frequent moves sometimes at the start of a school year, but can become even more challenging for families of students with special needs. Students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan due to identified disabilities or the requirement of specialized services must be provided a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IEP process is a legal process protecting the educational rights for students with disabilities. For military families, as stated

by Jacobson and Benbenishty (2012), “this entire process is repeated multiple times and educators in one district may not always see the same situation the same way as those in the child’s previous school” (p. 50). In collaboration with the special needs some families may have, the military also has the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), in which “ the needs of military family members requiring special medical, developmental, emotional, or other services are considered when a serviceman or woman is transferred” (p. 51). They provide other resources in support of military families with special needs children to receive the proper care and education possible:

- STOMP—stands for Specialized Training of Military Parents and is a nationwide parent training and information center for military families.
- The MilitaryHOMEFRONT—is a website providing a listing of EFMP/special needs contacts for all military installations both in the United States and overseas.
- “Understanding the Special Education Process as a Military Parent”—is a four-part guide available on the MilitaryOneSource.mil website. (p. 52)

In all supports, effective communication and collaboration among installations, families, and school systems are essential to the successful execution and follow through for the academic achievement of the military connected children. With the focus on the soldier and the family, the military supports surround those serving our country with opportunities to be resilient with assistance in light of the many challenges faced. The local community continues to be a mechanism for supporting mobile military families as a means of creating an environment where children can thrive.

Social Learning Theory and Parental Involvement

Parents and educators alike, whether through observation or interaction, examine the

way children act in a variety of situations. As the father of five boys, I know the varied comfort levels of my sons in different environments. The different environments they are most generally involved socially are at school, extracurricular activities, in the community, and at home. They each have individual attitudes and comfort levels in the different environments. For example, my youngest son is the most comfortable in all settings, which I attribute to his socialization with different ages of his brother's friends. Through a discussion of the context of Social Learning Theory, I will provide an understanding as to why mobile military children exhibit certain behaviors. Bandura (1977) describes Social Learning Theory as,

Emphasizing the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Thus it focuses on learning by observation and modeling. The theory originally evolved from behaviorism but now includes many of the ideas that cognitivists also hold; as a result it is sometimes called social cognitive learning. Social learning theory talks about how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behavior. It focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling. (p. 22)

Next, will be a look at the history of Social Learning Theory. According to Patricia H. Miller (2010), "Social Learning Theory was born in the 1930's at Yale University, perhaps when Clark Hull offered a graduate seminar on relating learning theory to psychoanalysis" (p. 170). Attending this same seminar were many of the future leaders in social learning theory. Miller (2010) goes on to state social learning theorists took content from 'Freudian Theory' such as dependency, aggression, identification, conscience formation, and defense mechanisms, while explaining behaviors through the observable stimulus response learning, rather than the unconscious which could not be observed... "the guided belief of social learning theorists was that personality is learned" (p. 171).

With the belief of personality being a learned trait, adults (namely parents), continuously attempt to teach children to behave in socially accepted ways of the adults in that society. The social behaviors taught by parents to their children are a reflection of the way the adult was raised and also how they currently perceive acceptable social interactions in their daily lives. As described by Miller (2010), “a major focus of social learning theory was socialization, the process by which society attempts to teach children to behave like the ideal adults of that society” (p. 171). For example, as I described earlier the make-up of the school district I work in, 94% of my students are dependents of an active duty military soldier. The armed forces are deep-rooted in tradition, respect, and support/protection of our country. Through these very same traditions, the military community derives its social interactions based on mutual respect of others...and for their children; it is respect for their elders in the community. It is not unlikely for a student in my schools to maintain his/her response to an adult as “Yes Ma’am, or No Ma’am” respectively when addressed. This is taught by many family members through socialization with others, as well as observed by the student(s) in their daily interaction with others in the same community. A mobile military child, through multiple moves from duty station to duty station based on the military assignment of their parent(s), observe a variety of military posts, communities, and even cultures. Miller (2010) additionally contends, “Social learning theorists broadened the types of learning to be explained. They saw the importance of observational learning: acquiring new skills or information or altering old behaviors simply by watching other children and adults or even reading a book” (p. 178). McLeod (2011) expands the discussion-describing children being surrounded by influential models, such as parents, TV characters, peers, and teachers. These models provide behaviors to imitate while they pay attention and may

“encode their behavior” for a later time in which they may imitate the behavior they observed previously (p. 1).

When encouraging children to adapt to all situations they encounter, our encouragement generally is in the form of examples of how to act, react, and speak in various situations. Miller (2010) asserts “learning theorists acknowledge that biology sets limits on what each species can learn, when it can learn the behavior, and how quickly it can learn it” (p. 175). Whether a mobile family or a mobile military family, observation and imitation of perceived appropriate behaviors and actions is the premise of how the children in the mobile family integrate in to new schools, neighborhoods, peer groups, and the communities they move into. During observational learning, “children try to reproduce the behaviors they have seen and receive feedback regarding how closely their behavior matched that of the model” (Miller, 2010). Across all settings, social learning for children becomes the premise by which they can learn, grow and adapt. For mobile military-connected students it is typical for them to take on the role as observer when entering a new school or setting. In a school district such as mine, of which is 94% active duty military-connected and experiences an average of 50% turnover in student population annually, there is a significant culture of initial observation...of school, staff, and peers as a way to learn the aspects and “lay of the land” per say. However, it does not take long for students to get to know each other, introduce themselves, and begin to exhibit behaviors of friends that have known each other for years. Not only does this speak to the importance of social learning, but also the personal aspects of resiliency of the mobile military-connected student.

Parental Involvement

The responsibility schools have to educate all students is a monumental task. This

task becomes even more of a mountain to climb when factors such as student mobility or military family re-assignment are entered in to the equation. However, the duty is not just on that of the schools. Parental involvement is a key role (or should) in the educational academic and behavioral growth of their child(ren). For the purposes of this proposed study, parental involvement will be defined as parent participation in the child's educational processes and experiences. A factor to consider regarding parental involvement relates to parents own educational experiences growing up. If a parent had a negative experience in school or was an underachiever they will be less likely to be a part of their own children's education. Comer (2005) states:

Many of today's students at greatest risk for underachievement or school failure are growing up in families that did not experience three generations of acculturation and upward mobility. Most often both parents, and the single parent, are in the workforce with low-paying jobs. The parents want their children to be successful in school and in life, but they themselves have not had the experience they need to help their children do so. (p. 89)

Price (2008) states that parental involvement decreases during adolescence, "the point at which older children are becoming more assertive and seeking greater autonomy from their families. As parental influence recedes, these youngsters turn to their peers and larger social structures around them" (pp. 16-17). Parents must immerse themselves in their children's learning and create a partnership with the school and classroom teacher(s). Parents must start from early on, instilling in their children, a thrill for learning.

Jeynes (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship of parental involvement and the academic performance of urban elementary aged school students. The meta-analysis examined 41 quantitative studies (20,000 plus students) that statistically distinguished variables for consideration (Jeynes, 2005). The studies were coded independently as Jeynes

(2005) states “for definitional criteria for parental involvement and whether specific aspects of parental involvement were met” (p. 243). The specific criteria considered in the meta-analysis were: general parental involvement; specific parental involvement; communication; homework; parental expectations; reading; attendance and participation; and parental style (Jeynes, 2005). The results of his meta-analysis indicated parental involvement and urban elementary school achievement improved for overall measures with statistically significant higher achievement for minority students and for boys and girls (pp. 246-247).

This parental involvement does not mean being a teacher for their children at home and re-teaching or spending hours at home on homework completion and projects. It means parents engaging the school and teacher(s) with how their children are doing, areas of strength and areas for growth. It should be noted that Jeynes (2005) meta-analysis referred to teachers being influenced by parental involvement to include grades and grading, in that the more parents were involved the more this consideration came in to grading and the grades of the child (p. 264). I assert in my district the reason our students perform at such high academic levels is in large part due to the involvement of one or both parents in the educational process of their child. According to Ban (2000), “Parents Assuring Student Success (PASS)” was created as a manual to “give parents the opportunity to acquire skills in teaching and reinforcing critical study habits at home” (p. 3). A list of the specific objectives of PASS are to develop parent understanding of and skill in:

- Enhancing attitude
- Providing a productive learning environment at home
- Teaching children how to manage their time, listen to instruction, and concentrate in class
- Managing homework and studying a textbook
- Guiding children to prepare for and take tests

- Taking notes and organizing information
- Enhancing memory and thinking processes
- Teaching reading at home (Ban, 2000)

PASS involves parents in their children's learning more than they may be used to or even more than they want. However, the impact of these skills enforced at home should increase test scores and improve student (and parent) engagement in school.

Effective School-Family partnerships initiated by the schools as a collaborative effort to positively impact the child can effectively enhance the learning of the child regardless of outside factors such as socio-economic status, race, etc. Epstein (1996) discusses six types of parental involvement that continue to be widely accepted as ways families and schools can collaborate. These six types are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration with the community (p. 271).

As a superintendent in a highly mobile military community, there is unprecedented parental involvement on an annual basis. There are two possible explanations for the extensive involvement: Concern for Student academics and value of education. The school district in which I work experiences an average annual student turnover of 50%. It is a Kindergarten through Ninth grade school district with approximately 1,900. Of these students, 94% of them are dependents with one or both parents being active duty military, 4% are dependents of retired military (formerly active duty and assigned to the military post), and two percent are children of full time staff members. An average of 50% are only in my school district for ten months before relocating to a different military installation. The make-up of the district alone provides for basic assumptions to the two explanations mentioned previously. While stationed at the military post where my district is located, soldiers and

families are encouraged by their commanding officers to utilize that time as a chance to reconnect as a family, a respite year of sorts. Many of the families at our location have either recently returned from a deployment (sometimes their second or third deployment) or will be deployed as part of their next duty assignment at the end of their time with us. The families use this time as directed, to get involved with their kids' education, sports, or other activities as well as motivate them to be involved even at a new duty station where they may not know anyone yet. Price (2008) provides the following as essential information on student motivation: "Motivation influences achievement; Perceived discrimination and devaluation can dampen motivation; Lack of motivation is reversible; Motivation can be cultivated and inculcated; the military is masterful at motivation; and Frequent recognition stokes motivation" (p. 43). Parents of mobile military children instill motivation into their children to do well and try hard, which also includes a structure of discipline and responsibility, which have long been associated with the military. As Cullinan et al. (1992) state:

Those who train military recruits, along with any experienced parents, will attest that discipline is part of what young people need most. It appears in many forms, whether it makes an athlete rise at dawn to train, drives a writer to spend personal time finishing a chapter, or motivates a military recruit to follow a squad leader's instruction...Self-discipline, a significant factor of maturity, is what allows parents, tired from a day's work, to still care for a home and children, and it is what makes them go to work in the first place. (pp. 6-7)

This structure and responsibility on behalf of the students and parents assists in supportive involvement and communication within the family unit as well as with the school. Because many of my districts' students have moved multiple times in their short educational career, parents utilize their time with us to get to know the teacher, learn what's going on in the classroom, assist children with homework, and advance their own studies.

Parental involvement should not be limited to the classroom or school. Children/youth need to see and experience their parent(s) being a contributing part of the community so they themselves understand the importance of being and staying involved. Ginsburg and Jablow (2011) brings to light that most youth see media portraying and presenting all the things that are problems with today's youth (p. 340). He continues by saying that most of our attention should be on the positive behaviors around us, and provides examples of how to do that as: "notice acts of generosity by youth; advocate for positive portrayal of youth; advocate for public health messages; advocate for enrichment programs; give youth opportunities to contribute; and work with the parents in the community" (pp. 340-341).

Research supports parental involvement in their child or children's academic career is essential to sustained success academically as well as in developing life skills for when the children begin to raise their own family. This involvement cannot be disingenuous or be perceived and forced into every situation. Parents cannot be too busy with their own challenges or seem impatient with their children because this may have an opposite intended effect and push the child away or create a situation where the child tends not to be open with the parent. Burnham (1999) shares that "parents need to make regular assessments of each child's abilities or knowledge in certain areas.

Adults know children and what makes them act or react in certain situations or conversations. Personally speaking, as I mentioned my own five sons before, they are all different and act/react differently depending on the situation. My wife and I must acknowledge the environment when together and be cognizant of the comfort levels and behaviors each may exhibit. The critical nature of parental involvement in a child's life, as it

extends to the school, classroom and home can have marked positive effects on a child's academic success and achievement. Ashby (2003) conducted a study with 86 mother-child dyads whose father was active duty military to gather information relative to maternal relationships with dependent children as associated with mobility (p. 1020). Ashby (2003) concluded, "positive mother-child relationships may reduce children's experiences of loneliness and serve as a buffer against the ill effects of children's experiences of social isolation" (p. 1021). The parental relationship as related to a nurturing environment can thrive even under the terms of mobility and attending different schools, as long as it remains genuine and caring.

Culture and Leadership

In an effort to illustrate effective leadership in shaping a school's culture as a learning organization, I will discuss culture and leadership as the formation for what an effective learning environment represents. An effective learning environment can provide support for varied student populations to include highly mobile military families. Selection of the superintendent, principals and leadership team for a school district by the Board of Education is a critical part in achieving the set goals and positioning the district for the future (Howley, Woodrum, Burgess, and Rhodes, 2009). In a school and/or district working towards a common goal of success for all students, the constructivist leadership perspective has a place in the learning environment being developed. Linda Lambert (1995) defines constructivist leadership as, "the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling" (p. 29).

Each person's experience with and in education may be seen through a different lens, impacted by heredity, culture, and environment. This lens is the baseline for what makes up a school's culture. For the purpose of this project, culture is defined as the behaviors and beliefs of a particular group. Wayne Hoy and Cecil Miskel (2005) describe culture in that it, "provides members with a commitment to beliefs and values beyond themselves; individuals belong to a group that is larger than themselves. When the culture is strong, so is their identification with the group and the influence of the group" (p. 27). The very essence of a school culture is made up from the stakeholders within the school. The stakeholders include everyone involved with the educational process within the school including students, parents, and all staff. Hoy and Miskel (2005) expand on culture with the notion of organizational culture, which is, "a system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinctive identity" (p. 165). But how is an organizational culture developed? Who develops this school culture? If the current culture is directed from top down, the buy in or success will be minimal. It should be a group commitment. Change within any group or organization can be very difficult. Going through a change or re-culturing can be trying and stressful on the organization as a whole. The hesitations associated with the overarching change must come to the surface. As stated by Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith (1997),

In order to begin to identify substantive issues involved with systemic change, it is necessary to use a critical theory approach that enables the deconstruction or demystification of the underlying assumptions and values that drive an existing school culture. Systemic change must be understood to be related to what is troubling us, i.e., the hegemony (p. 155).

Michael Apple (1996) provides the clearest definition of hegemony asserting, “The concept of hegemony refers to a process in which dominant groups in society come together to form a block and sustain leadership over subordinate groups” (p. 14). These dominant groups refer to any formation of group within a school such as a department, a grade level, the veteran teachers, etc. The military installation in the Midwest where this study was conducted represents a breakdown of approximately 50 percent officer rank and 50 percent enlisted soldier rank as discussed by the installation command group in community meetings. In the military, rank is associated with power and decision-making which refers to dominant groups as referred to in the definition of hegemony provided above.

My experiences within this setting, validate the leadership, structure, and focus of the officer families participating in this study. These families engage in planning and execution for the tasks at hand, which is a sign of leadership, and typical of the officers in the military that I have worked with in my career. The school district associated with this study is not a typical public school district. Its uniqueness across the country because of the high concentration of military is unlike most. Additionally, the Board of Education is appointed rather than elected like most other public school boards. In many instances in a general public school setting, money is power when it comes to getting elected to serve on a board of education. However, with the Board of Education I deal with that is appointed by the military commander, their personal agendas focus on making decisions that are best for the students and education of the mobile military-connected children enrolled.

Sustained leadership and vision for reaching the goals of an educational institution or district must include empowerment and collaboration. In an interview with John O’Neil,

Peter Senge (1995) defines a learning organization as “an organization in which people at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create” (p. 20). Peter Senge (1994) went in further detail to state, “Guiding ideas for learning organizations start with a vision, values, and purpose: what the organization stands for and what its members seek to create. Every organization, whether it deliberately creates them or not, is governed according to some explicit principles” (p. 23). When focused on the students as a critical component of a learning organization, culture and leadership can be developed around the needs of the school and/or district relative to what is most important. As stated by Schmoker (2006),

A new, more powerful conception of leadership begins with the recognition that we must eliminate the senseless things that now divert leaders’ time and attention away from the two elements most vital to school success: how we teach, which is best improved through teacher collaboration, and what we teach in a guaranteed and viable curriculum. (p. 128)

The role of the principal is vast, but manageable when he/she proceeds with the ability to empower the staff and share the leadership. This does not mean giving away authority, but rather giving out shared authority to make positive change and alignment for instruction and academic growth of students. As stated by Lisa Carter (2007), “a principal’s active participation is often the most important factor in determining whether total instructional alignment will be implemented” (p. 106). Linda Lambert (2003) provides an effective list of questions principals should ask themselves when evaluating their own style:

- How was the last important decision made in our school? Did it involve those affected by the decision?
- When asked for a decision, do I make it without thinking about the process of including others?

- When I observe teachers, students, or staff members doing things that I consider unacceptable, do I quickly correct and redirect them or do I involve them in a problem-solving conversation about the behavior?
- Do I get overly frustrated with process and long for the day when I could just do it myself?
- Do I delegate tasks only to take them back if things aren't going the way I want them to go? (p. 47).
-

These questions assist in framing the role of the principal in a learning organization culture built to positively impact student achievement, student behavior, and transform the workplace in to a truly democratic environment through the involvement of all stakeholders. Re-culturing is not top-down or even bottom-up, but rather collaborative, focused with vision and goals, and democratic. As stated by DuFour and Marzano (2011), “it requires effective leadership to create a shared vision that addresses the hopes and dreams of people within the organization” (p. 201). A high leadership capacity school/district that includes principals, teachers, students, parents in the work of leadership in the school will most likely achieve high student performance (Lambert, 2003). A collaborative culture where stakeholders serve the school to achieve the established goals provides a team effort focused on the big picture. Robert Greenleaf (1970) differentiated between leader-first leaders and servant-first leaders as,

The leader-first leaders seek leadership for personal power and gain. The servant-first leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve to make sure the others' highest priority are met. The best test, and the most difficult to administer is: Do they grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 7)

Barley and Beesley (2007) conducted an empirical study on what factors are perceived by school personnel to contribute to academic success in high-performing, high-needs rural schools. The most important factors perceived from five schools were “high expectations,

focus on student learning, use of data, individualized instruction, teacher retention and professional development, and alignment of curriculum with assessment. They all reported a supportive relationship with their community” (p. 1). These perceptions from staff in these rural schools centered around service and leadership for academic success. In Chapter 5, I expand on culture and leadership by discussing leadership implications surfacing from this study.

Resiliency

Coping skills and resiliency are just what these children develop and maintain throughout their multiple moves. For purposes of this project, resiliency will be defined as an ability to successfully recover from and/or adjust/adapt to challenges, change, or adversity. How do these children build the inner strength to cope with the challenges and hurdles from being a mobile military family? Having the confidence and skills to face, overcome and even be strengthened by hardship is a powerful adaptation to teach them. This is not to say children must be put in difficult, stressful situations to learn coping skills or develop a resiliency to challenges, but it does mean a child’s personal characteristics and development play a role. According to Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, and Kincaid (2009) studies show that development of resiliency is primarily a process (p. 14). They continue,

Some individuals have biological or genetic tendencies, such as positive temperament, good health, cognitive competence, and physical attractiveness that may contribute to their resiliency. However, most of the dispositional characteristics associated with resiliency, and the coping skills needed to adapt to stressors, can be learned and supported. (p. 15)

Coping skills and adaptation to what will be faced in life are essential components of resilience. Adults, whether it is educators, community members, neighbors or parents, must

recognize the difficulties encountered by children. There is a definite need to get to know the whole child and why he/she is acting a certain way if behaviors and academics seem to change or are not consistent with behavioral patterns the child or children have previously displayed. In some families with military children they may have encountered a traumatic experience. This trauma could be a move, a recent parent deployment, a parent injured as a result of military service, and/or possibly the death of a parent (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011; Jacobson & Benbenishty, 2012). As part of professional development in my district, I provide information and training on cultural and social influences our students may be exposed to as a result of transience, trauma, or life as a military child altogether. The professional development provided is intended for the staff to understand and sympathize with the students they teach. In line with the professional development provided in my district, Wolpow et al. (2009) reference questions from Framingham, Massachusetts School District handbook on teacher strategies in an effort to address the child's culture of origin:

- a. What are acceptable boundaries for personal space?
- b. How are emotions expressed, identified and valued?
- c. How is respect shown?
- d. How are embarrassment, pride, fear, and anger expressed?
- e. How do gender roles affect behavior?
- f. How is body language used in communication?
- g. How does immigration and acculturation impact family roles?
- h. How and/or why is education valued?
- i. What is the role of the family in a child's education?
- j. Is the child from a group-focused or individualistic culture? (p. 28)

The previous list of questions is intended to empower the staff and teachers to better understand their students to include behaviors, academics, and emotions. In a mobile military environment, family supports are generally in place as part of a structure whether created by the family unit or the military. Sheppard et al. (2010) note that military families

are “generally resilient” (p. 603). They continue asserting, “flexible gender roles, and comfort performing multiple roles may help families tolerate and adapt to the demands brought on by military deployments” (p. 603). The assumption should not be that the previous questions presented by Wolpow et al. (2009) are always considered, because the human aspect of choice and willing receipt of assistance are additional factors impacting the ability to receive compassion and help. With the military providing structure and supports for the mobile families and families with a deployed soldier, resiliency is created and built up with students...but can it be sustained by a child over multiple moves or deployments effectively? Chandra et al. (2010) share information from focus groups that relates to the difficulty of multiple separations in deployment. In that, some may have handled the first deployment fairly well but have become less engaged and more oppositional in ‘avoidant behaviors’, with some becoming more apathetic and not having the same resolve to confront the separations because of the multiple deployments (p. 4). The significance of the exhibited resiliency and the potential waning resiliency caused by multiple deployments, and arguably multiple moves is an area that must be addressed not only from a family unit standpoint, but even from the community and school vantage points.

Before discussing ways to build and develop resiliency in children, I must first discuss ways to engage and create a comfortable environment for all students, including those who are transient. A good environment as a baseline is a step in the right direction, though not a complete solution. The right environment begins with a partnership with the community and the school. Teachers and school staff may spend as much time or more with students than parents at times, noting that if a child feels connected to school they are more likely to succeed there (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011). Previous assumptions were that the

schools focus on curriculum and assessment and the community focuses on everything outside the school. Students enter school, albeit possibly shy and reserved at first introduction, with a sincere trust of their teacher. The classroom teacher(s) must recognize this responsibility and harness this trust for continued growth of the students in his/her class(es). A teacher is much more than the person at the front of the room lecturing facts and expecting the students to regurgitate it back when asked for a grade. The classroom teacher and staff must develop strategies for creating a successful environment in which mobile military-connected students can succeed socially and academically. Classroom strategies that could assist with the arrival of new students could include: quick assessments; meeting the parents soon after arrival; a structured classroom that is also welcoming; keeping extra supplies and textbooks so day one for a new student means they have everything they need; and opportunity to meet the academic needs of each student whether through remediation or enrichment (Jacobson & Benbenishty, 2012). Refer back to my earlier discussion on the need for differentiated instruction and individualized learning. The premises behind these are not only a best practice for academic growth, but also in development of each child. One of the challenges to differentiating and individualizing is that each student is different. The phrase ‘no two snowflakes are alike’ is also true for children. Each child has a different mindset, background experiences, interests, goals, likes and dislikes, and is motivated in different ways. Though not limited to the list provided, these factors create quite the diverse classroom environment, and just scratch the surface of what makes students motivated to learn. I’ve spent many years as an administrator working with staff to understand perception of actions, comments, and attitude. Whether for adults, or more importantly children,

perception is a reality. What a child perceives the environment to be...in his/her mind that is the reality of the room. According to Raver et al. (2007),

Students have an uncanny way of “seeing” the truth of a teacher’s attitudes. They have an extraordinary ability to sense emotional, spiritual, or intuitive communication. If want students to trust us and believe what we tell them, we must build a personal relationship with them; learning, creating, and changing involve issues of the heart, or spirit. Without a trusting relationship, what teachers say or do has little influence. Students can tell if we are interested in them, and they respond based on their perceptions. (pp. 133-134)

Children are raised to be naturally trusting of adults, but are also influenced by what they see, hear and feel. For example, I have worked with teachers that have used sarcasm as a way to “joke” with students or to make a point. If a student asks a question about the lesson, and the teacher responds with a sarcastic comment like, “Are you serious?” “Do you really think that could happen?” or “That doesn’t even pass the common sense test.” Comments like these, and there are many more I’ve overheard being made to kids, can negatively impact a child’s self-esteem causing doubt of intellectual ability or self-worth. Once a student begins to go down this road where trust has been broken, and the child perceives the teacher doesn’t think he/she is smart or knows anything, it is very difficult to regain the ground lost. It is then where staff begin to see students behave differently, withdraw from lessons or discussions, and try to blend in for fear of attention being drawn to them out of fear of embarrassment by peers. This speaks to environment, led by the teacher, modeled by the teacher, kept positive by the teacher, and guided to a positive environment for the entire class. A teacher’s daily impact on the lives of their students cannot be underestimated. Teachers, and the school for that matter, must foster an environment that promotes opportunities for resilience in the classroom. This can include protective factors developed by a safe student friendly

environment. According to the Joondalup Education Office (2000) in Western Australia, teachers who promote protective factors are able to assist in: “Reducing behavior problems; Reducing suspension rates; Managing mental health issues in the classroom; Preventing drug use; Promoting harm minimization strategies; Promoting mental health; Increasing attachment to school; and Fostering a sense of community and belonging” (p. 2). From the aspect of teaching or teacher inputs and assistance, the activities and classroom environment play a key role. Morrison and Allen (2007) describe the teaching context as providing “opportunities to enhance a student’s personal qualities or assets such as intrinsic motivation, learning strategies, and problem solving skills. Teachers can support and enhance intrinsic motivation by rewarding effort and cooperation and by emphasizing natural interest areas” (p. 165). Promoting the previously mentioned positive factors in the classroom and school environment can assist greatly in the attitudes and actions of the students, which in turn can decrease stress and emotional or behavioral issues that may otherwise be present.

In an effort to promote a positive environment and one that includes resiliency factors as part of the school culture, it is also necessary to discuss what makes children resilient. It is fair to assume society, adults, and the community, all play a big role in the development of young people. According to Davis (1999), “given an adequately facilitating environment, people have the capacity for positive change and for the development of at least some of the characteristics of resilience throughout their lives” (p. 5). With this in mind, the Joondalup District Education Office (2000) through the Education Department of Western Australia presents a list of identified “personal traits of a resilient individual”, though not an exhaustive list: “positive problem solving skills; functional coping styles and strategies; confident optimism; self-efficacy; high sense of worth; awareness and empathy for others; willingness

and capacity to plan; good communication and social skills; and good teacher/school bonding” (pp. 5-6). A related realization is that resilience in children occurs through normal human adaptive processes, including the development of cognition, regulation of behavior, and interactions with caregivers and the environment (Masten, 2001). Whether internationally (Australian Education Department) or in the United States, factors contribute to the positive growth of students and resilient characteristics. The previous attributes that make young persons resilient have a heavy reliance on the adults/schools/community as a support as well. In support of the resilience factors across the ocean from the Joondalup District Education Office in Australia, is the consistency in America with Rak and Patterson’s (1996) contention of “the ability to make and sustain friendships, and the ability of support networks of friends, siblings and other important social ties have been associated with resilience, both in children and later in life” (p. 5). The previous examples illustrate that whether in the United States or abroad, there are consistencies in factors that can help all children be successful regardless of surroundings or situations.

Resilient students have support from a parent or another adult significant to their life that assists them in meeting challenges. Additionally, individual characteristics must be developed and utilized to adapt to challenges and change. Werner (2005) discusses the Kauai Longitudinal Study in which 698 children from a variety of backgrounds, races, socio-economic status and ages were selected. The research team chose varied ages to represent stages in the lifecycle that are critical for development (p. 11). In gathering data on protective factors within individual children, Werner (2005) stated,

By age 10, the children who succeeded against the odds had higher scores on tests of practical problem-solving skills and were better readers than those who developed behavior or learning problems. They also had a special talent that gave them a sense

of pride, and they willingly assisted others who needed help. By late adolescence, they had developed belief in their own effectiveness and a conviction that the problems they confronted could be overcome by their own actions. They had more realistic education and vocational plans, and higher expectations for their future than did their peers with coping problems. (p. 12)

In relation to the perception of adults relative to child resiliency, Howard, Dryden, and Johnson (1999) assert, “A potential problem with research assumes that all participants share the same definitions of risk and resilience is that policies and programs will be developed that are based, with the best intentions, on adult interpretations and perspectives” (p. 318). To expand our understandings and beliefs on the topic of child resiliency, one must expand his thinking to include the specific feedback of the very young people the perspective is about. With all that is known regarding the factors necessary to assist our young people in building protective characteristics and resiliency, adults need to do a better job in the school systems of fostering these factors and supporting them.

Initially, adults may assume resiliency exhibited from children may stem from experiences or guidance or acceptance. Some behaviors are a result of stress. Everyone experiences stress, whether it is at work or at home, it is a part of our lives. Pressure can lead to stress, as can worry and responsibility. It can also affect the body. Ginsburg and Jablow (2011) speak to the amazing abilities of the human body. He says, “It can transform quickly to meet multiple needs. Intricate connections between nerves, hormones, and cells allow for rapid changes to occur based on the emotions, thoughts, pleasures, and fears that our brain experiences” (p. 15). A move for a family can be stressful. There is a need to find a new house, new school, establish a new doctor and dentist, make friends, learn the community and be a part of the community. Stress can be used as a benefit to situations as a means to

focus, energize, react, or act. They speak to the benefits of low levels of stress in that it creates a “heightened vigilance” that can help us. He relates it as, “...what helps us finish reports and helps our children study when anticipation of a test generates just the right amount of stress” (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011). Resiliency can be taught by a means of strategies for development. To do this, all stakeholders must have a common understanding of language, communication and aspects that make up resiliency. Ginsburg and Jablow (2011) break down resiliency in to seven core components that are simple by definition but powerful as a whole in the development and sustainment of resiliency in children. These seven components are: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Contribution, Coping and Control (p. 24). Children may already be strong in some of these components, but as a family, community, and school system it is our job to work collaboratively to develop what is missing so our children are empowered with a resiliency to deal with situations. Dealing with situations by way of resilience can also mean adapting to social situations and learning from our surroundings and our adult mentors of how to interact socially or in varied environments.

Summary

This literature review has provided empirical research and supporting information in an attempt to clearly present the areas of student mobility, whether non-military related or military affiliated; mobile military family student academics and supports; social learning theory and parental involvement; culture and leadership; and resiliency. As discussed previously, the factors related to mobility of military-connected children requires further exploration. This inquiry was a qualitative study focusing on the stories and structures as shared from a critical-case sample of participants.

In continuing to research literature for and around the academic performance of the mobile military-connected child, I was selective in the variables that are most important and pertinent to the research study. This allowed for a better-aligned narratological research study. The following chapter, chapter three, provides the rationale as well as the design of the proposed study to include sampling, data collection, and limitations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this narratological case study, conducted in a naturalistic environment, is to explore strategies that assist in academic performance utilized by mobile military families located at a Midwest military installation. The controversy addressed in this study is the limited attention in the literature regarding the academic performance of mobile military-connected students. The controversy surrounds this topic because of the extensive research on the mobility of non-military public school students but a limited body of research on the academic performance of mobile military-connected children. Those students moving multiple times in an educational career are considered as not having opportunities to learn which leads to lower academic success; however, the data suggest that this is not the case for military connected students. The goal of this study was to make more explicit the perspectives and strategies used by families of mobile military-connected children that can be shared with non-military families. The preliminary questions guiding my inquiry are: (1) How do military parents describe their experiences related to family mobility? (2) What strategies do highly mobile military parents identify that assist with student academics in a variety of educational settings? (3) What support mechanisms for education do military parents receive to assist with mobility? and (4) What concerns would mobile military families like to see addressed for additional support in transition?

The research questions are intended to be focused and deliberate for exploring the nature of mobility for this population of students through the stories of their parents.

According to Creswell (2013), questions “provide an opportunity to encode and foreshadow

an approach to inquiry” (p. 138). In this chapter an in-depth discussion of the methodology for this study is presented, including rationale for qualitative research, the setting for the study, participants and sampling techniques, data collection and analysis, and limitations including validity, reliability, and ethical considerations. The significance of this study lies in relation to the academic performance of mobile military-connected students and the strategies put in place by the parents/guardians to ensure there is no decrease in achievement due to frequent relocation. It is my hope that this study contributes to the body of research surrounding frequent mobility of military-connected children and provides successful strategies that can be emulated by not only military but also non-military mobile families.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

In this qualitative study, thick description (Ponterotto, 2006) was used to develop an understanding, rather than to test theories or compare groups, which is commonly the purview of quantitative studies. Ponterotto described the origin of the term and its adoption by other theorists. Thick description was originally conceptualized by Ryle and borrowed by Geertz to describe his studies with ethnography as well as other theorists including Denzin, Holloway, and Schwandt. Ponterotto noted for Ryle, “thick description involves understanding and absorbing the context of the situation or behavior. It also involves ascribing present and future intentionality to the behavior” (p. 539). Thick description is befitting to qualitative inquiry for “both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behavior) within its particular context” (p. 543) taking in consideration intentionality. Additionally, many definitions of qualitative research have surfaced regarding this concept. Creswell (2013) draws on the understanding of thick description to define “qualitative research as begins [beginning] with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical

frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). Sherman and Webb (1988) write, “qualitative research implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’” (p. 7). Maxwell (2013) emphasized the description rather than numbers in qualitative research in that, “the strengths of qualitative research derive significantly from this process of orientation toward the world, and the inductive approach, focus on specific situations or people and emphasis on descriptions rather than numbers that this requires” (p. 30). This study fits a qualitative design because of its focus on the meaning and contexts of actions or behaviors of mobile military-connected families regarding the education of their children as they transition from duty station to duty station on a frequent basis. The nature of the unique differences in experiences of families cannot be captured by the objective and scientific stance of quantitative research. Qualitative designs make use of a number of theoretical traditions, clarified by Patton (2002) as, “...this certainly includes the most common and philosophical frameworks...and documents the variety of perspectives that can inform qualitative inquiry” (p. 130). The theoretical traditions I used in conducting this study were narratology and case study.

Case Study

Multiple case study research of mobile military families was conducted as part of this study, as each family is considered a case. For the purpose of this study, the definition for case study will be from Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1984), and is stated as:

The detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases. (p. 34)

Case study, as defined by Yin (2014), is done because researchers “want to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the case” (p. 16). Through gathering stories, conducting interviews and collecting documents, the multiple case study research will come together for this study. Yin (2014) reiterates, “How case study research comprises an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 17). I used intrinsic case study as opposed to descriptive or instrumental case studies. According to Willig (2013), descriptive case studies provide detailed description of the phenomenon within context and instrumental case studies are selected to allow the researcher to “study the phenomenon of interest” (p. 103). Whereas, in this study, intrinsic case study is defined as a particular phenomenon of interest rather than a more general problem (Willig, 2013). Intrinsic case studies, as stated by Willig (2013) can be said to be “pre-specified in the sense that their intrinsic interest pre-exists in the research” (p. 103).

Narratology

In utilizing the tradition of narratology, clear determination of direction was established for completion of the research. Patton (2002) describes Narratology as “extending the idea of text to include in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative non-fiction” (p. 115). He asserted that the narrative analysis process will, “reveal cultural and societal patterns through the lens of individual experience” (p. 115). Creswell (2013) contends that narrative data “need to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies. Within this broad sketch of analysis, several options exist for the narrative researcher” (p. 188). The authentic lived stories provided by the mobile military families of this study surfaced through

my listening to their stories and presenting them as thick description. Patterns emerged from the consistencies and structures put in place for each relocation that contribute to the body of this research in a way that can be duplicated for other transient families, whether military connected or non-military. In essence, as described by Maxwell (2013), the opportunity of external generalizability exists, defined as “generalizability beyond that case, setting, or group, to other persons, times and settings” (p. 137). Potential duplication may come by use of the strategies described through the narrative writing prompt, interview questions, and artifacts that can effectively transcend to a general mobile population. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide some working characteristics for narrative inquiry as in, “it is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20). These mobile families share their stories through the lens of their experiences with mobility.

Through my gathering of the stories related to mobility and child rearing, the data is critical support in the study being conducted. As stated by Riessman (2005), “personal narrative encompasses long sections of talk – extended accounts of lives that develop over the course of the single or multiple interviews” (p. 1). These stories reveal facts related to a variety of experiences and dealings within mobile military families in a public school setting.

Design of the Study

The setting was a public school district in the Midwest, with a high concentration of military-connected children of active duty soldiers in one of the branches of armed forces. Within this district, there are nearly 1,900 military-connected students, which also represent a cross-section of the officer ranks. The stories of the academic experiences of the children of mobile military families as told by parents were the units of analyses. Unit of analysis is

defined as the ‘who’ or ‘what’ that I analyzed for this study. Patton (2002) states “individual people” are often the unit of analysis (p. 228). In that “the primary focus of data collection will be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting” (p. 228),

Participants and Sampling

I studied five transient military families, all with an active duty or retired military parent and at least one student in grade six that has moved 3 or more times, representing the diverse make-up of the population in the district. The sampling strategy used for this study was purposeful sampling. Maxwell (2013) lists five possible goals for purposeful selection:

1. Achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected.
2. Capture the heterogeneity in the population.
3. Deliberately select individuals or cases that are critical for testing the theories.
4. Establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals.
5. Select groups or participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships, ones that will best enable you to answer your research questions. (pp. 98-99)

The first purposeful sampling strategy used was criterion sampling, intended for identifying and selecting critical cases for the study. According to Patton (2002), critical cases are those that can:

Make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things. The existence of a critical case is a statement to the effect that ‘if it happens there, it will happen anywhere,’ or vice versa, ‘if it doesn’t happen there, it won’t happen anywhere’. (p. 236)

Of these critical case samplings their selection was intentional or purposeful. Maxwell (2005) utilizes the term “purposeful sampling selection” as the term to relate sampling to a qualitative research (p. 88). He also provides four possible goals for purposeful selection [as

is the case with this proposed study] of which are achieving representativeness or typicality of individuals; capturing the population's heterogeneity; examining other critical case studies with similar theories; and establish particular comparisons (pp. 89-91). A critical case sampling for my study allowed me to develop logical generalizations from the evidence produced by my sample group. In selecting a diverse representative sample group, I was also able to identify the dimensions that make them a critical case sampling. The determination for this study to be a critical case study relates to the uniqueness of the problem relative to transience and academic performance associated with military connected children as opposed to transience and academic performance of non-military public school students.

The criteria for selecting these families included parents with a school-aged child in the sixth grade in a public school in the Midwest with a high concentration of mobile military families. Additionally, the families will have moved at least three times prior to the child's sixth grade year and have a minimum of a 'C' average academically in subject letter grades as determined by the district's student management system.

The five families involved in this study were a maximum variation sampling. Creswell (2013) states this approach "consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants, and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria" (p. 157). The maximum variation sampling to expand the initial selection was: family has a student who has maintained a 'C' average or better as determined through the school district's student management system grade records; a representation of the diverse population of the public school district; and parents earning the military rank of officer. Diverse population will be defined, for use in this study, as having distinct qualities

and differences. Additionally, there will be three girls and two boys and military rank of officer.

The Process

Data collection included personal narratives submitted by the families, parent interviews and a collection of documents/artifacts related to schooling of the five 6th graders. Purposeful criterion sampling strategy was used intentionally for identifying and selecting critical cases for the study. Initially, I sent out an email to all families in Military Unified School District that had a sixth grade student asking for volunteers to participate if their child has been in at least three different elementary schools since kindergarten. From that initial email, there were six families that responded asking to participate. Of those six, only five followed up with formal approval and continued participation. [One family did not respond to any contact after the first reply they sent spanning over three months and four additional attempts to contact them regarding participation.] As defined by Maxwell (2013), a goal of purposeful sampling can be “to select groups or participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships, ones that will best enable you to answer your research questions” (p. 99). Using the design of narratology and case study, the three data sources are intended to help tell the story of mobile military families; to explore the strategies utilized by mobile military families to lessen the chance or effects transience may have on academic performance. As eloquently described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000),

One soon discovers that one is never too clear on what one is up to. One of the important lessons to be learned for narrative inquirers from this is that they need to find many places, not only in the field, to explain to others what they are doing (p. 73).

By sharing their personal stories, I hope to increase the awareness of ways to address mobility for both military and non-military families. The excitement from the participants was verbally and visually expressed about my interest in helping them with such a challenging phenomenon as mobility. After spending time reading/analyzing stories and interviews, and gathering meaning from the artifacts they shared, I realized that I had a lot to learn from them.

With my experience of eighteen years working with and educating mobile military families and their children, I was conscious of the nature of reflexivity and its role in qualitative inquiry. Because of the conversations I've had over the years with families regarding mobility and the difficulties they may face with multiple moves, not only as a family but also for the children, I was careful not to insert my own feelings and biases into the interviews and conversations with families. I wanted to ensure that the parent stories, interviews, and documents/artifacts collected were self-submitted and not guided by what the participants thought I wanted them to say. According to Patton (2015), "to be reflexive is to undertake an ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it" (p. 70).

Through crystallization, I sought to achieve depth in the data collected rather than a two-dimensional approach. By definition, Ellingson (2009) describes crystallization as "strong themes or patterns supported by examples providing a wide-angle view of the setting or phenomenon" (p. 10). I brought my wide-angle view to the data collection based on the time spent in communication and meetings with the participants. I collected data from the five families over a six-month period. Within that time-frame, I identified participants, communicated with them about the project and data collection, obtained participants' personal narratives, refined interview questions, arranged for the interviews which involved

emailing the parent participants over thirty times, spent over six hours with them during the parent interviews on-site, and analyzed the data with the purpose of pulling together the themes from the personal narratives, parent interviews, and collection of documents/artifacts. To validate the data, I utilized member checking for clarity and accuracy of the transcribed interviews. I also used an outside critical friend to read over my coding of data and subsequent themes. My critical friend was an Assistant Research Professor with a PhD working at a large Mid-Western state University. Her reading and input over my coding and themeing was essential as a means to make sure my own bias did not misinterpret the data collected.

Making Meaning

As discussed in earlier chapters, my interest in this study was based on my professional work with highly mobile military families and military-connected students. Through discussions and stories shared with me at the various levels of my administrative career, there seemed to be a formation or consistency within the common structures of a military relocation. From those early discussions, my research interest focused on examining these cases, or in other words, analytic induction. Patton (2015) states,

Those using analytic induction have eliminated the emphasis on discovering universal causal generalizations and have, instead, emphasized it as a strategy for engaging in qualitative inquiry and comparative case analysis that includes examining pre-conceived hypotheses – that is, without the pretense of the mental blank slate advocated in purer forms of phenomenological inquiry and grounded theory. (p. 592)

Essentially, making meaning using qualitative analysis involves interpretations of interpretations. As Creswell (2013) states, “Interpretation involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (p. 187). The participants bring their

own interpretations of the phenomena, I bring mine and there is a continuous checking to ensure that the researcher is authentically presenting their participants' interpretations.

Prior to conducting this study, I had not met the families that volunteered to participate. For some of them, this was their first and only year at the duty station and for others it was their second year, with a third year unlikely. Moreover, I did not personally know their sixth grade children; as described earlier in chapter 3, the families of the five students were selected because of their willingness to participate in the study from my initial email request that they replied volunteering to be involved.

My original frame of mind as the researcher, coming from a mindset of what I believed was a familiarity with military mobility (though never experiencing it myself), was that of some basic structures in place. My original purpose when I began this study was to expose some basic structures that may help/assist other military families with transition not only as a family unit but also for positive impact on the children's academics and school experience. Through the process of data collection my original purpose came to fruition but was enhanced by the stories the families told about their mobile experiences from duty station to duty station. From this, I came to better understand not only the basic structures that must be considered in a mobile transition, but also the stressors and emotions surrounding major change to a family unit such as this.

Though the participants still saw me as an administrator in charge of the Military Unified School District, I believe they also genuinely appreciated the research I conducted because of the bigger picture focus. On the one hand, the families verbally expressed appreciation for the research that was being conducted. On the other hand, the participants were also able to be reflective of their own approaches and structures in place for their

multiple moves related to military orders. To that end, through the submission of personal narratives, the parent interviews, and the collection of documents/artifacts, several comments were made about new considerations or structures that will now be put in place by them (or considerations) for their upcoming and future moves.

Data were coded using Ethnograph 6.0 (Seidel, 1998), a software data management process for qualitative data analysis that supported the management of data, including compiling an initial list of codes, coding the data, creating memos, and identifying a list of common narrative themes. Analysis involved an approach that incorporated “themeing the data” (Saldaña, 2013, p, 177), appropriate for participant-generated data that aided the use of interpretive frameworks to make meaning of participants’ lived experiences (Grbich 2013; Miles, Huberman &, Saldaña, 2013). Themeing the data helped to identify various themes and to determine similarities, differences, and relationships; “the themes and their related data serve as illustrative examples to support the interpretation” (Saldaña, 2013, p, 180).

Each of the five participant families were considered cases. I examined each case individually and sought to find themes that were common across cases (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2013). Ethnograph 6.0 (Seidel, 1998) helped me use the exploratory method of holistic coding in my analysis. Holistic coding, as defined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), “applies a single code to a large unit of data in the corpus, rather than line-by-line coding, to capture a sense of overall contents and the possible categories that may develop” (p. 77). The identification of sub-themes was a significant component to the illumination of four themes in the data that contributed to making meaning. While field texts are coded with “narrative analytic terms in mind such as character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.131), meaning and significance

ultimately shape the meaning of the text. I report the findings of the study by first describing the themes identified in the participants' storied accounts of experiences with mobility through personal narratives, in-depth interviews, and artifacts. Following the report on individual themes, each case is presented in what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as a "three dimensional narrative inquiry framework" (p. 60) in order to gain insight into social interactions as my inquiry moved from "field to field text, and from field text to research text" (p. 60). Hence, the stories from the five families reflect the themes from all data sources and are holistic accounts of their experiences with mobility as related to military relocation from duty station to duty station.

Themes in the Data. Through the process of "themeing the data", four themes central to the study of mobile military families were apprehended: (1) Strategies, (2) Identity, (3) School/School Choice, and (4) Moving/Mobility. The focused approach I used was intended to bring forth the essence of the data with sufficient context and not be mired by trying to include everything that might possibly be described (Harry and Wolcott, 2001). The subsequent research text comprises the stories of five families who volunteered to share their experiences.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this research, I used narrative analysis, parent interviews, and documents to collect data. Creswell (2013) describes data collection as focusing in on the types of data to be collected as well as the procedures for collecting it. "It means gaining permissions, conducting a good qualitative sampling strategy, developing means for recording information both digitally and on paper, storing the data, and anticipating ethical issues that may arise" (p. 145). With the possibility of an overload of information through

data collection, I accumulated only critical data to address the extent of my research questions. As summarized by Harry & Wolcott (2001), “the trick is to discover the essences and to reveal those essences with sufficient context, yet not become mired trying to include everything that might possibly be described” (p. 44).

Narratives

In an effort to capture strategies and structures that mobile military families may utilize when moving from duty station to duty station, I was interested in participants sharing their stories of transitions. Via email communication, I sent the five participant families a narrative story prompt with details as to what I wanted them to include in the stories. The prompt I sent each of them was:

In your own words related to personal experience, describe for me in writing the details, planning and execution of the move from one duty station to the next. Please begin your reflection from when military orders are received (or prior to that if it helps build the story) to the first day of school for your child (before, during and after you are settled in the new location).

I also provided a deadline for submission of their personal narratives to me. I asked the participants to be as detailed as possible but did not specify a required length or number of words. I asked the families to submit their personal narratives either typed or handwritten. All five families submitted them as typed PDF or Word documents via email.

It is important to this research as well as the greater body of research for the parents to openly and honestly share the experiences of their mobility through telling a story. As stated by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), “it is important that the research listen first to the practitioner’s story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story” (p. 4). I asked open-ended prompts requesting the parents to describe in detail the process they go

through as a family in: preparing for an upcoming move; what is done during the actual move; and what the process is when they arrive in their new duty station/location. My intent was to collect data regarding the possibility of any similarities among the mobile families through their stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) verbalize it best as, “the central task is evident when it is grasped that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others” (p. 4).

Interviews

The face-to-face interviews with the five families took place at the central office location of Military Unified School District within the community. This centralized location was familiar to the families and comfortable for the purposes of the interviews. One case included an interview with both parents of the sixth grade student with the father being the active duty service-member, a second case involved only the active duty mother (father is also active duty, meaning this is a dual military family), and in the three remaining cases the spouses (wives) of the active duty soldier participated. The five interviews ranged from thirty minutes in length to ninety minutes. These were contextualized conversations that consisted of follow-up questions and clarifying questions related to mobility and the processes these families experience. I conducted follow-up telephone interviews, to clarify responses when I was unsure of what was being said and sent email questions before I sent transcripts back for approval.

I interviewed the parents with open-ended questions focused on a transient family lifestyle and education experience. For the purpose of this study, the term interview will be defined as a technique of gathering data by asking participants questions and asking them to

respond verbally (Potter, 1996). The interviews were semi-structured. A semi-structured interview, as defined by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), “are generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewees” (p. 315). The protocol was outlined with specific questions geared to guiding the interviewee towards sharing family strategies and structures in place prior to, during and after a move to a new duty station. Additionally, open-ended questions gave the participants the ability to answer subjectively about their lived experiences. According to Seidman (1991), “An open-ended question, unlike a leading question, establishes the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction he or she wants. It does not presume an answer” (p. 62).

In an effort to conduct viable and detailed interviews with the participants, I maintained structure and consistency. Creswell (2013), describes nine interviewing steps as part of the data collection process: decide on process; identify interviewees; determine type of interview; adequate recording procedures; use of an interview protocol; refine questions and procedures through pilot testing; obtain consent from interviewees; and use good interview procedures (pp. 163-166). The parents of each family were interviewed as a couple (if available) for a family perspective. In the design of this study, working with the five families as outlined before, there was a total of five interviews (one for each family). Each of the five interviewees was asked the same list of six questions (see Appendix B). The responses were transcribed for themeing during the data analysis. The interview questions were posed in a way that allows for open-ended expansion of answers relative to each individual’s experiences with multiple moves.

Documents/Artifacts

The third data collection approach in this study was the collection of documents/artifacts. Documents are defined as public materials, photographs, special awards, certificates of achievement, and artifacts relevant to the family (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the term artifact is used synonymously with documents. The collection of documents as part of this research study should contribute and support the narratives the parents share as well as the answers they provide in the interviews. As asserted by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “memory boxes [as in storage device] are collections of items that trigger memories of important times, people, and events” (p. 114). These stored items, whether in a photo albums, storage boxes, memory boxes, or digital storage, travel with mobile military families from duty station to duty station. With my experience in working with these families during my career, many have said they typically only move with essential items. These essential items can include family photos and family memorabilia. It may have family significance or even sometimes-geographic significance to their family and the time they’ve spent in different duty stations.

Examples of the artifacts that I consider may be important to the scope of this study include items significant to the parents in relation to their child and his/her awards, certificates, and achievements even with frequent moves as related to military mobility. As has been shared with me in my current role by parents, items such as certificates of appreciation, youth volunteer awards, leadership recognition, and athletic honors are important artifacts that frame out the whole family. By collecting these artifacts, in addition to the narrative story prompts and the interview questions, I gained a well-rounded understanding of the strategies and activities that may assist parents who move frequently as

associated with military assignment. The specific instructions I gave the participants relating to my interest in collecting documents/artifacts was:

As part of my data collection, I'm interested in finding out what artifacts and/or documents each family considers as most important during packing, moving and unpacking. (Examples could include: stuffed animals, family picture, iPod's, ...i.e. things close to each person that are part of every move for comfort, etc.) I do not need the actual artifacts or documents, but a photo of them would be great. If there is identifiable information from the artifact/document, a verbal explanation will be sufficient.

The documents/artifacts serve as memory boxes collecting items triggering important memories, people, places, and/or events (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In many cases, the documents/artifacts may represent time and place memories from previous duty stations or homes.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research data analysis, according to Creswell (2013), "consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (p. 180). Through the concept of crystallization I used the narratives, interviews, and documents as a means to collect the data. Crystallization, as defined by Ellingson (2009),

Provides another way of achieving depth, through the compilation not only of many details but also of different forms of representing, organizing, and analyzing those details. Strong themes or patterns supported by examples provide a wide-angle view of the setting or phenomenon; stories or poems highlight individual experiences, emotions, and expression. (p. 10)

The concept of crystallization evolves from what Tobin and Begley (2004) explains as a shift from formerly seeing things as “fixed or two-dimensional” [in data collection and research] to seeing things with the “concept of a crystal which allows for infinite variety of shape, substance, transmutations, multi-dimensionality and angles of approach” (p. 393). This multi-sided view of the data and research provided a lens in this project that supported the intended purpose as outlined previously. My involvement as an educator in this military post, allows my participation and involvement.

After collecting the three forms of data over a period ranging from one to two months (depending on the availability of the participants), I patterned the themes as a way to bring to the surface any trends or similarities based on military family mobility. For the purpose of this analysis, I define the term “theme” (“themeing the data” Saldaña, (2013, p. 14) for data interpretation, as a method of using key words or phrases to develop patterns that will give insight to the consistencies between all transient families. According to Saldaña (2013), a theme is “an outcome of coding, categorizations, or analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” (p. 14). He expands this definition, in that, “thematic analysis or the search for themes in the data is a strategic choice as a part of the research design that includes primary questions, goals, conceptual framework, and the literature review” (p.177). The identification of the themes in the data provided a framework for answering the research questions. Themes in qualitative research, as stated by Creswell (2013), “are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea. These themes, in turn, viewed as a ‘family’ of themes with children, or subthemes, and even grandchildren represented by segments of data” (p. 186). After collecting and reviewing the narratives, interview questions, and documents, the information was transcribed for clarity and validity

for the purposes of coding. Wolcott (2001) states analysis, “follows standard procedures for observing, measuring, and communicating with others about the nature of what is “there”, the reality of the everyday world as we experience it” (p. 33). For the narrative analysis I used what Miles & Huberman (1994) describe as a “classic set of analytic moves”, which is:

- Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from interviews
- Noting reflections or other remarks in the margins
- Sorting and sifting through the material to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, and district differences or commonalities
- Gradually elaborating a small set of generalizations over the consistencies
- Confronting generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge. (p. 9)

In continuing the analysis, the information was put in to different “arrays”, “tabulated” for frequency, and developed in a “chronological order” as a way of getting started (Yin, 2014).

In the continued analysis process of interpreting the data, the coding process was expanded beyond the generalized results. As Creswell (2013) states, “it is a process that begins with the development of the codes, the formation of the themes from the codes, and then organization of themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data” (p. 187).

Through the use of member checking, defined for my research study as allowing study participants to review gathered data (themeing, interview notes, observation notes), I ensured the information presented was correct and accurate. Sharan B. Merriam (1988) defines member checks as “taking data and interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (p. 169). Member checking validated the data collected from the observations and interviews, so as to remove any perceptions that were gleaned by the researcher, and enlist the intent of meaning from the respondent. I also enlisted the assistance from a peer or peers for peer review. The term peer

is defined as a person or persons who are in the same field or area of employment that will “critique” this project writing, which in this case is education (Brammer & Reese, 2007). Peer review was an effective way of having an individual, not connected to the study, read and assess the methods used, and their effectiveness in answering the research questions of the study. Additionally, having an outside-reader was of great benefit in determining the clarity and conciseness with which the study is presented. Does this study make sense to an individual “outside” of the education field? To this end, the outside reader was provided background discussion from this project prior to review by which to draw an understanding of the project framework and data presented. The project itself, with a clear theoretical framework and methodology, allowed an outside reader from education to clearly grasp the problem and questions in need of answer.

The gathering of data through this qualitative study was through engagement in the local setting over a sustained period of time ranging from one to six months. This additionally provided a historical narrative representation that extended beyond the scope of data gathering and expands through time with which the mobile families have experienced their transience (since sampling criteria includes moving a minimum of three times). The qualitative process focused on the lives of real people and their experiences, thus leading to successful presentation of strategies and interventions for further studies through the analysis of the qualitative data. Miles and Huberman (1994) define [qualitative] analysis as “consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 10). The three previous segments that empower the use of qualitative data analysis are continuous as before, during and after the data is collected. As has been presented within the project, cross-case analysis, which Creswell (2013) defines as

“thematic analysis across all cases” (p. 101), has been established as developing the framework on mobile military-connected children and their academic performance. The analysis between non-military mobile public school students and mobile military-connected public school students was utilized in this cross-case interpretation of the data. Presentation or display of the data is best determined by the researcher, which includes the scope of the study in how to illustrate the information gathered. From this, I moved forward with discussion of limitations, validity and reliability of the data gathered and analyzed ethical considerations.

Validity

As in the previously described methods I used to confirm validity in this study, by contrast it removed any threat to the validity of the presented research. Validity in qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) “has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description. Qualitative researchers do not claim that there way is the only way of interpreting an event. There is no one “correct” interpretation” (p. 393). To expand, validity as a component of this study was not focused on claiming there is only one way to interpret an event, but rather to rule out specific threats by studying the data gathered. Maxwell (2005) asserts:

The main emphasis of a qualitative proposal ought to be on how you will rule out specific plausible alternatives and threats to your interpretations and explanations. Citations of authorities and invocation of standard approaches are less important than providing a clear argument that the approaches described will adequately deal with the particular threats in question, in the context of the study being proposed. (p. 107)

To this end, the possible comparison of transient public schools students and transient military connected public school students was present as a threat. However, according to Yin (2014) the goal “is to identify all reasonable threats to validity and to conduct repeated comparisons” (p. 145), showing how such threats cannot account for any patterns of comparison. Loh (2013) asserts “narrative studies look at the interpretations of personal realities, and it is important these studies meet the criterion of verisimilitude” (p. 9). Verisimilitude is defined by Hornby (2005) in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as “the quality of seeming to be real or true” (p. 1698). Loh (2013) expands the discussion by stating the quality of verisimilitude “is important because it allows others to have the vicarious experience of being in the similar situation and thereby being able to understand the decisions made and the emotions felt by the participants in the study” (p. 10). In an effort maintain validity, this project allowed the reader(s) to know the data is believable and the findings can be duplicated.

Limitations

The Department of the Army is currently working towards the mandatory collection of military-connected student data related to school enrollment, mobility rates and performance on summative assessments. There is a wider range of research discussing non-military public school transient students and their academic performance, which is used comparatively, where appropriate within the depth and breadth of this study. The validity and reliability with supporting strategies are discussed within the content of the research design and methodology. Two important threats to validity are the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory, goals, and preconceptions, and the selection of data that stand out to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Maxwell, 2013). Limitations extended

to the small number of families participating, and the limited group dynamics within the branches of the military. Because of the criteria of having a 6th grader that has moved at least three times while school-aged, this prevented the expansion of the volunteer group within the enlisted ranks in the school district located in the Midwest.

Bias

My named bias within the scope of this study lies within my educational assertions that contradict lower academic achievement in a mobile military population. I assert parent involvement, structure, and resiliency provide the greatest opportunity to counter the negative academic affects within a mobile military setting. Through my literature review, data collection, narrative summaries and surveys, my assertions are supported throughout this study. I approached the analysis of the data, without preconceived perceptions of the content of the stories the families would share. My own interest on this topic widened the scope in which my review of the literature spanned varied areas of mobility with non-military public school academics, which in turn provided insight to the depth of resiliency exhibited by not only the children but the parents too. An additional bias to be named is within the scope of my current role as superintendent of schools where this research study was generated. I have worked in this setting nearly my entire career or 18 years and have been focused on the high mobility rate of students that have transitioned in and out of this school district every year. Maxwell (2013) describes qualitative research as being “primarily concerned with understanding how a particular researcher’s values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences of these” (p. 124). As described earlier, I used crystallization through participation (observation), interviews, and documents as a means to gather data for

this study. In doing so, the limitations must be named as possibilities. There are two initial limitations that Patton (2002) describes what a researcher must be aware of through the gathering of data. The researcher must be cautious of the “limitations of observations” and that the observer may affect the situation in unknown ways. Additionally, the “interview data limitations” may possibly distort responses due to outside issues or personal beliefs/feelings (p. 306). Specifically with my study, limitations during participation (observation) and interviews can be impacted by the emotional state or well-being at the time with these subjects. Situations/stressors as described earlier in this study, such as deployment of a spouse, reintegration to the family of the spouse, and injury or loss of a spouse during combat may all contribute to the limitations of my study.

Summary

In gathering the data from the stories the families shared, the in-person interviews, and collection of documents/artifacts, I was cognizant of the sensitivities surrounding open sharing related to mobility, family structure, levels of stress and anxiety, and emotion related to frequent mobility. From the beginning of this study, I maintained a high level of confidentiality with the families involved. All five families selected pseudo-names to represent their stories and interview data. Data will be maintained confidentially as required by the SSIRB, under lock and key so their anonymity is protected as volunteers in the study. In each instance of narrative collection and interviews it was clear the purpose was to tell their story as highly mobile military families and not create a scenario that would individualize any participant by providing identifiable details. It was critical to create a comfort level to be open and honest regarding the aspects associated with what it means to be a military family. The sensitivities surrounding multiple deployments, relocation, military

assignment, and aspects associated with raising a family in these conditions were contributing factors that enhanced the sharing of stories.

In the next chapter, I discuss the results gained from the families through their interviews and narratives, as well as the artifacts gathered. The data gathered through this study provided insight and structured support for the aspects associated with military mobility. The final chapter, Chapter 5, summarizes and concludes this study as well as presents and discusses any implications that surfaced as part of this project. A greater understanding of mobile military families will naturally be infused through the data gathered.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING SENSE OF THEIR STORIES

While the research suggests transience is detrimental to non-military public school students, there are gaps in the research regarding military-connected children mobility and academics (Garber, 2003; Sanderson, 2003). Hence, the purpose of this narratological case study was to explore the strategies utilized by mobile military families to lessen the chance or effects transience may have on academic performance. A pragmatic goal of this study was to provide evidence of strategies utilized by mobile military families to proactively address transience, so it is not a factor-affecting children in transition. Additionally, while the focus is on military-connected public school students, parallels can be made to assist non-military transient public school students as well. As will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, four themes central to the study of mobile military families were apprehended: (1) Strategies, (2) Identity, (3) School/School Choice, and (4) Moving/Mobility. Each theme will include quotes and examples from study participants providing a critical lens to the evidence provided.

In a study by DePedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, and Astor (2014), public schools can play a critical role in increasing supports for military-connected students who are experiencing a parental separation, coping with a loss, and/or grappling with multiple facets of a deployment (p. 2). In many instances, public school administrators and staff are not aware whether a student is military-connected or non-military. In the DePedro et al. (2014) study, some participants reported the one significant procedure missing in public schools is the ability to identify military-connected youth, because in many instances it is not known if

a child is military-connected (p. 22). Professionally, due to my membership in two national organizations that support federally connected children (to include military), I'm aware of discussion on a Federal level of potential statutes that would require a military student identifier for all public schools through a district's student management system. While the law has not been passed on a national level yet, progress is being made to this end.

As a superintendent for a highly concentrated military-connected student population in a midwestern public school district, pseudo-named Military Unified School District, I have an intensive interest in the academic success of military students who are likely to experience mobility throughout their k-12 academic experience. I entered this study knowing the impact of non-military public school student transience on achievement and wondered how highly mobile military families addressed this issue. The questions that guided my inquiry were:

- (1) How do military parents describe their experiences related to family mobility?
- (2) What strategies do highly mobile military parents identify that assist with student academics in a variety of educational settings?
- (3) What support mechanisms for education do military parents receive to assist with mobility?
- (4) What concerns would mobile military families like to see addressed for additional support in transition?

Mobility of military families in this school district is quite common with an average of 50% of the families moving each year to another duty station, as determined by the student management software for the district. For this study, five families who have a sixth grade student that has moved at least three times during their school-aged years were purposefully selected based on this initial criteria. Of these five families, three of the sixth graders were

female and two were male. The diversity of the students included Asian/Native Hawaiian, African American, and three Caucasians; consistent with the demographic percentages of ethnicities in Military Unified School District (Kansas Can Kansas Report Card for 2014-2015 School Year). Among the five families at least one parent was active duty military (in one family both parents were active duty military), with the active duty soldier being one of the various officer ranks in the military. The five families (6 soldiers total counting the one family that was dual-military) consisted of the soldiers holding the rank of Captain (2), Major (3), and Lieutenant Colonel (1). Through data analysis strategies, identity, school/school choice, and mobility were most frequently discussed and formed the themes for this study.

Strategies. Defined as the tools, assistance, and help available or sought out by mobile military families, *Strategies* were before, during, and after a relocation to help resolve tensions related to the move. All five families described anxieties in the move that caused them to draw on advanced exploration/research and information gathering, through communicating with friends/acquaintances at the next duty station or those that have been there previously. This type of mental preparation was essential in prioritizing and organizing the move. Strategies guided families to understand as much about the new duty station as possible prior to arrival. In as much, communication was ongoing with friends/acquaintances and family to know or meet someone who has already experienced the duty station or was currently there. The parents prioritized their strategies by way of communication, research, mental preparation, and organization. Through prioritized strategy development from the parents, student learning was a significant factor. Children are not blank slates when they arrive to a classroom. They come with preconceptions and background learning from the many locations they've traveled. As stated by Pelligrino, Chudowsky, and Glaser (2001),

“much of student’s knowledge must be understood as highly contextualized and embedded in the situation in which it was acquired” (p. 50). To that end, adult learning has similarly shifted from the individual’s perspective to learning in context to where the adult is situated, whether workplace or environment (Merriam, 2008). The embedded information in terms of how hum.an beings learn and function, serves as a repertoire of strategies relied upon for use at appropriate learning opportunities.

Identity. Through the participants’ rich descriptions of the family members’ emotions, likes, dislikes, challenges, and successes, the identity of self and situation for not only the family but also that of individuals was elucidated. With a focus on togetherness, as in spending quality family time together, before, during, and after the transition to the new duty station any lived or perceived concerns were addressed as an adjustment to change and newness of the situation and surroundings. Children understanding their own identity and competence gain a sense of confidence. As stated by Ginsburg and Jablow (2011), “Children who experience their own competence and know they are safe and protected develop a deep-seated security that promotes confidence to face and cope with challenges” (p. 25). Confidence fosters resilience because it results from demonstrated competence (Ginsburg and Jablow, 2011). Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, and Lerner (2013) stress that “resilience is not a personal trait but a product of the relationships between children and the people and resources around them – for example, a strong sense of belonging to a supportive community with a shared mission and values” (p. 99).

School/School Choice. This theme was defined as opportunities, locations, and academics as related to formal public schooling. A significant discussion point that surfaced throughout data was the types of programs available in schools and in the choice of new

schools while preparing for mobility. Guiding the theme of school/school choice was a honed focus on interests, academic strengths, and academic challenges of the mobile child. Considerations of the need for specialized programs, to include special education services was a top priority for future school enrollment. In many instances, the participants would use technology as a strategy to investigate schools located in the next assigned duty station. Tools included school websites, informational websites like greatschools.org giving scores to schools in zip codes for parents to review, and social media posts such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate with friends and family about the local schools in a given community. By conducting this research, the families were selecting the school for their next duty station. School choice, especially within a highly mobile military population and culture, is a top priority and a central theme in overall school reform. Empirical research done by Schneider and Buckley (2002) revealed student body demographics, location/housing, basic school programs, and test scores as those aspects considered the highest when searching for schools (p. 138-139). In preparing for the change, school calendars and family calendars would also need to be synced in preparation for the pending change of duty station as a final task in preparing to relocate.

Moving/Mobility. The theme of *Moving/Mobility* was defined in a broad sense as the aspects associated with relocation. In the stages of potential relocation where the military family has a “wish list” of locations the military may assign them...to the actual military orders...then packing of household goods... securing housing/quarters...and reporting to the next duty station, the participants in this study all related experiences, challenges, and highlights around *Moving/Mobility*. Moving is a significant aspect of military life. Schacter (2004) states, “between 2002 and 2003, 40.1 million residents moved” (p. 2), and of those

22% moved to different states or abroad (p. 1). Burrell, Adams, Durand, and Castro (2006) report,

Thirty-One percent of army spouses experience relocation with a frequency of relocation high among spouses of junior enlisted and company grade officers. These relocations can disrupt family life, friendships, and other supportive relationships in the present community and necessitate the seeking and development of new relationships in a new community. (p. 44)

The military organization is a persuasive organization within the family unit, and research has focused on the family-environment fit and the family's successful adaptation to military demands (Croan, LeVine, & Blankinship, 1992). When a family first arrives to their new duty station the soldier must go through in processing broadly defined as checking in and reporting for duty. The family must also secure quarters (housing) through the housing office or if living off the installation find a home to rent or buy. Each military duty station has supports in place for incoming families, from contact information with post housing to liaisons to assist with the transition and integration to the new community.

All three data sources were viewed in totality to create the "story" of each family. Each case is presented in a holistic account to develop a picture of the issues I studied.

Creswell (2013) describes holistic account as:

Reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges. Researchers are bound not by tight cause-and-effect relationships among factors, but rather by identifying the complex interactions of factors in any situation. (p. 47)

Utilizing a holistic approach to summarizing multiple data meant exploring the "whole" picture as a means to understand its entirety. Patton (2015) brings meaning to this concept as,

A description and interpretation of a person's social environment or an organization's external context is essential for an overall understanding of what has been observed during field work or said in an interview. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts. (p. 67)

In the following sections I will share each family's story gleaned from their personal narratives, parent interviews, and documents/artifacts. The five study participants were asked to personally select pseudo-names to be used in the study to protect confidentiality of the informants. The families were: the "Goldberg" family; the "Tag" family; the "Reader" family; the "Jones" family; and the "Rockatansky" family. At the conclusion of this chapter, I use the findings to address the research questions and bring to the forefront the implications of the findings, which are more thoroughly discussed in the concluding chapter.

Family Case Studies

The Goldberg Family

The "Goldberg" family has three school-aged children, ages 10, 12, and 14. Their race/ethnicity is Caucasian. The 6th grader has moved schools five times in his seven years of formal schooling. Since the father joined the military in 2005, the family has moved eight times, and he now has the rank of Captain. Through their multiple moves they have identified key strategies that are important in making each move a success for their children as related to school and academics. Initially they do not immediately tell the children they are moving. The Goldberg family felt it was important to talk about the moves with their

children, gauging their feelings and building excitement around the next duty station. They shared:

Through experience, we have learned that once we tell them where or when we are moving, any changes seems to affect them more than usual. When our date is finalized, we sit the kids down and discuss with them what activity that can only be done in the local town or area they want to do before we move. We focus on the importance of sharing positive thoughts both in regards to where we currently live, and the anticipation for a new family adventure.

Throughout the various moves the kids have identified certain items that are significant to them, and these are packed in the backpacks for them to have during the move. The backpacks include items that in essence define the identity of each child. They include special toys, a stuffed animal, books to read, and items to draw and write with.

A majority of the moves for the Goldberg family have occurred during the summer. This is important for transition out of and into a new community for the children to be able to integrate and begin a school year with all other students. Moving many times can be difficult, let alone being exacerbated if it were during a school year already underway. Mrs. Goldberg shared that transition is difficult enough, especially with so frequent of moves. From her interview, she stated that for her kids to be successful academically, moving in the summer presents the greatest opportunity for ease of transition. She continued, “We try to live on post because the schools on post are more familiar with military kids and families and what our challenges are...they just seem to cater to the needs of our kids more socially and academically”. With each move the Goldberg family researches the district for the next move. The types of things they look for in the new school are program offerings, sports, clubs, curriculum listed on the district website, enrollment information, placement testing,

requirements for new families, etc. Mrs. Goldberg shared that one key is finding as much information out ahead of time which makes the biggest difference in a smooth transition.

From the time the movers pack up the Goldberg family to the time when the father must report to his new unit, time is spent visiting family and friends. Mrs. Goldberg went on to explain:

Our kids' birthday's are during the fall season. Many times we will purposely throw them birthday parties with friends in the spring before we move. For my husband and I, it is important for us to schedule all social and local activities one to two months before we move. This is because preparing to move is extremely busy and we spend the few remaining weekends preparing the house for the movers. As moving day gets close I go through each of the kids' room's and pack up cherished items that we take with us, so they are not broken or lost. Once we move into our new home, I focus on unpacking what we need to live on. It is important for me to spend quality time with the kids in our new home and surroundings.

Even with the above structures described by Mrs. Goldberg, her and her husband must still remind the children (and themselves) to remain flexible to any changes. Mrs. Goldberg finished her narrative and verbal description of mobility with the following closing statement:

Our motto is: attitude is the difference between an ordeal and an adventure. As painful as it might be at times to move, I truly believe our children have learned a lot from these many changes.

Through the mother's description and verbalization of the challenges faced by the Goldberg family, it was clear that the attitude of the family was one of optimism and going on an adventure. Because Captain Goldberg has deployed multiple times, Mrs. Goldberg highlighted specifically the importance of spending time together as a family. Mrs. Goldberg states "keep the important things important". Boxes of pictures were not as important to the Goldberg family because digital saving of photographs has made that easier. However, they

do keep close at hand the important documents that may be special and emotional. One such item given as an example was the Goldberg marriage license. Their marriage license is never packed by the movers, does not end up in some box to be possibly lost or ruined, and is kept close at hand because of its symbolism of togetherness and family. For the 6th grade student in this family, an important item was a stuffed animal. Mrs. Goldberg stated the stuffed animal is “a little beat up because it’s been hugged a lot” during the moves.

Their experiences with mobility were described as positive. The message Mrs. Goldberg was clear on was making sure all priorities fall in place from the beginning. Mrs. Goldberg reiterated again, since they have been apart multiple times due to her husband’s military duties and/or deployment, family time will continue to remain a priority. As she reiterated, as long as they have each other, changes and challenges with moving are just new hurdles to tackle together.

The next priority the Goldberg’s focus on is school. The focus on school takes on several meanings because of the many changes that accompany relocation. New schools mean new teachers, new teaching styles and many times a different curriculum. Mrs. Goldberg noted her kids need to work hard to continue to be successful academically. Part of the research done prior to moving is in looking at the programs and curriculum in the new school. In some of their moves, the children were able to transition more easily with their grades because what they were learning in their old school was in line with what the new school was doing. That is not always the case. In some states, the curriculum standards are different. This could cause holes of learning that the kids must catch up to so as not to be behind the rest of the class. The best way to make sure her kids are successful in school is to make sure there is open communication between the teachers and home. By having good

communication, if there are academic challenges, they can be addressed. Mrs. Goldberg mentioned her kids work very hard in school and have been successful, even through the multiple moves. As she reflected on the past moves and future transitions, she said the Goldberg's will continue to focus on the strategies that have been successful and be positive about each experience.

The Tag Family

In the "Tag" family, the father is the active duty soldier and holds the rank of Major. They have two children, a 6th grade girl and a 5th grade boy. The 6th grader has attended four different schools since Kindergarten in the locations of Copperas Cove, Texas (2008-2011); Charlottesville, VA (2011-2012); Colorado Springs, CO (2012-2014); and then "Military Unified School District" located in the Midwest (from 2014-2016).

Their mobility process begins when they receive the list of potential future duty stations. The list is tentative in nature based on locations the soldier may be assigned. First, MAJ Tag prioritizes the list based on which are the best career options for him. Next, the Tag family prioritizes the duty stations based on which posts offer the best educational options for children. Mrs. Tag stated:

I hate to say it, it's not always a scientific process that I use. Number one, it's word of mouth. Who do I know that's there? That usually gets me off to a good start, but the second thing is the ratings, where they rank, not necessarily always in tests scores, but I even go on websites like greatschools.org and see where the local schools rate.

As a general rule, the Tag family does not typically request military assignment to locations that do not have a good educational system because school is a top priority. Mrs. Tag then launches into her list of items to research as soon as MAJ Tag finds out the final assignment.

In her effort to develop strategies for school choice and moving, Mrs. Tag presented the following list of questions to guide her mental preparation and organization:

- What is the best school district within 1-hour drive of post?
 - Do we need to look up private or parochial schools?
- When we find the right school:
 - What grades are elementary? Middle school/Jr. high?
 - Do they have a gifted program?
 - Do they have band? What grade levels?
 - What is the academic calendar? How will it affect summer break and travel?
- Who do we know that already lives at this new duty station?
 - What are their recommendations for best schools, neighborhoods, sports, etc.?
- Which neighborhood will we live in to be in the best school district?
 - Bus or walk or drive?
 - Check sex offender registry
- What are the sport club options? Soccer, lacrosse, softball, baseball?

When looking at the next duty station, Mrs. Tag relied heavily on communication as well as research. She stated, “I find a lot of military spouses are teachers (by trade) or have that background and they can read and interpret the data on the school’s ranking which would make things much easier. I’m in business marketing, he’s a lawyer...so we figure it out together through talking about the schools, seeing what the facilities look like, and exploring what programs are available for our kids.

MAJ Tag spoke of the importance of keeping in contact with friends/acquaintances that he has been stationed with before. Having moved around quite a bit and seeing many familiar faces in the various locations, forming lasting relationships has enabled him to be able to reach out to a core group of friends with each move. In one of his specific assignments he had a core group of about fifteen people that he spent a year with. He shared,

I spent everyday with them and you met most of the spouses. We could probably reach out to them too, for future assignments, because we are all probably scattered throughout the United States. I stayed at that location for another year, but everyone

else scattered...so those are folks that are now at different posts where we can probably reach out when we get our orders.

Without being able to communicate with these friends MAJ Tag noted the additional challenge that would come from “the unknown”. With the aspect of social media and the use of technology to find out lots of information ahead of time, the Tag family researches as much information as possible.

MAJ and Mrs. Tag shared a component that is not readily available to all military families. As a regular event, the Tag children spend about a month in the summer with their grandparents. The grandparents drive to the current duty station and take them to their house in the state they live. The kids spend a good portion of the summer with their grandparents. Not only is this important for spending time with family, it also allows flexibility for MAJ and Mrs. Tag to “get things in order”. This way, when the kids are brought back to the new duty station, their rooms are already set-up, the house is in order, and things are organized. This keeps the potential disarray of changing houses, packing and unpacking out of the scope of the children’s responsibilities. They have a great time with grandma and grandpa, and get to join us at the next duty station to start our new adventure. When the kids arrive the parents have already scouted out the area for things to do and start the new adventure exploring.

The Tag family has consistently taken their current furniture to their new homes. When discussing things or stuff that travels with them, furniture gives a sense of familiarity with “family” because it is a good reminder of something that is theirs. Even though the house may be different and in a different state, they have the same beds, couch, chairs, etc.. As far as important things for the children, Mrs. Tag shared their kids don’t really get attached to items, besides their phones. When I discussed any lessons learned from their

multiple moves as a family, they both agreed on one statement, “don’t make any promises”. Whether that’s promises about when they will go visit their friends or what they will do when they get there...it is still not making any promises...the only promise will be that they will meet somebody new in the next duty station.

The Reader Family

The “Reader” family has experienced mobile military life with several relocations. LTC Reader has been in the Army for eighteen and a half years. During that period he has moved nine times. LTC and Mrs. Reader have two children ages 12 (6th grade) and 7 (2nd grade) of Asian/Native Hawaiian descent. Since their oldest child has been in school, he has moved four times and been in three different school districts since preschool. Their military assignments have provided the ability to come back to one duty station for a second time. While this was still considered a move, there was a sense of familiarity and awareness upon return.

LTC and Mrs. Reader approach each move with a sense of openness as a family. As they arrive to each duty station, they communicate with the children how long they can expect to stay there. Typically LTC Reader will have a sense of how long his assignments are at each place, generally their moves have been approximately two years. In telling the children how long to expect to stay, the kids can settle in for a period of time and then mentally prepare when the move is approaching. Mrs. Reader stated this makes the kids not plan too many things too far in the future.

I asked Mrs. Reader to share with me a sense of what she does to prepare for a move when she finds out the location of the next duty station. She said they usually find out where they are going at the end of February or beginning of March. When that happens she stated,

I feel like I take off running after being held back at the starting blocks. My usual starting place is the internet. I start to look up everything about our gaining post – schools, neighborhoods, unit info, things to do, churches, etc. When I find a website that I might want to reference again, I will either send it to myself in an e-mail or a Facebook message and I will store it in a folder with everything regarding the move.

The initial description Mrs. Reader shared included what I will call a launch off point. Her description of feeling like she has been held back at the starting blocks gave me a glimpse of the potential emotion and anxiety that can come with frequent moves.

Now that location is known, LTC and Mrs. Reader sit down with a calendar, pinpoint a report for duty date, and work backwards from there. They like to give themselves as much time as possible for the move because they like to maintain a schedule that is consistent with a normal day. If they are driving to the next duty station, they try to limit travel days to six or seven hours, stopping at as many places of interest along the way. Then when we stop, we can get something to eat as a family, let the kids swim in the hotel pool, and keep the kids' sleep schedule of going to bed at 8:00PM. She said it has always been important to maintain consistency not only for the kids, but also for her and her husband.

When they arrive at the new duty station, the first thing the Reader's do is go directly to housing. They say the sooner they can get quarters, the sooner they can settle in. As soon as the household goods arrive in their new house they have an unpacking strategy. Mrs.

Reader explains it as in the following way:

My husband does what I call “crazy-mad unpacking” where he goes through all the boxes like the Tasmanian devil and literally dumps everything out onto the floor. We then pile up all the boxes outside of the house and arrange to have them taken away as soon as possible. My first priority is to get the kitchen established – so before everything arrives, I would have already gone through the kitchen (and, next, the rest of the house) with post-it notes labeled with items and I will place them wherever I want that item to go. That way, when the things arrive, they already have a place set aside for them and all I have to do is put them away.

Mrs. Reader and the kids can then focus on the new location, the community, the school, and meeting new friends.

By this time, Mrs. Reader has already shown the kids the school, pictures of the school, started the hype about cool programs at the school, and let their excitement start to gear up. Their 6th grade son doesn't look forward to moves. He wants to have a home, friends, and stay in one place. Knowing this about him, LTC and Mrs. Reader try to help him focus on the positives of change instead of the negatives. The Reader children have done well in school in each location they have been. Academics have not been an overarching concern, as much as helping make the transition smooth and structured. She stated the kids generally love school and have been eager to talk about their day when they get home. In talking about the start of school, Mrs. Reader said,

The first week of school at a new school is not always easy, so we try to pay extra attention to the kids and how they are adjusting. Even if the first week is rough, they are usually just fine and thriving by the end of the second or third week.

Even though there can be challenges with mobility and transition, the Reader family has maintained their identity through keeping certain possessions with them through the moves and to make the moves easier. Mrs. Reader shared visual representations with me of key possessions for the family. These possessions include: their marriage license, vehicle titles, birth certificates, a stuffed animal, action figures, an iPad, a laptop, mobile DVD players, 2 scooters, a stack of books, pencils, a football, a Frisbee, board games, a Keurig, a coffee pot, and peanut M&M's (specifically for Mrs. Reader). Whether these possessions are

considered comforts of home, or essential travel requirements, they make every trip. Items such as these the Mrs. Reader said are not just for comforts, but to ease the moves.

The Jones Family

The Jones family is a dual military, African-American family with three children. Captain and Major Jones' three children are in Preschool, 6th grade, and 8th grade. The dual military dynamic of the Jones' family is one that can create greater challenges than solely a change of duty station. Because both parents are active duty soldiers, there is a greater likelihood of separation of one or both of the parents from the children due to deployment. In instances such as this, the required military family care plan may come into play if both parents are deployed. In this situation, typically the children would stay with other family members or family members would come and stay with the children. Captain and Major Jones consider their duty assignments and requested locations carefully because they are both active duty military. Their focus is truly centered on finding the best schools and community for their kids. MAJ Jones stated,

Even prior to receiving orders we research the available duty stations and take on a proactive dialogue with our assignment managers requesting available duty stations that have the best schools districts. We look at school district scores, high school graduation rates, and college bound and trade ratios within the school district. We also look at the local newspaper to get a sense of what the community has going on and if the school has deep community ties.

Intense research is done to select the best school for their children. Once a school is selected the Jones' begin the "hype" at home getting the kids excited about where they're going to go to school. MAJ Jones said, "We point out to our children the many good events that will happen at their new school, we highlight the district's academic record and provide them encouragement regarding the upcoming change". If possible, the Jones' connect the children

with friends from previous moves that are either already attending that school or will be the next year also.

Success at the new school begins even prior to the first day for the Jones family.

MAJ Jones explains,

I am a big believer in that it takes a village to raise a child. With that mentality I work vigorously before the start of the school year to meet with my children's teachers or school counselors to go over any particulars regarding my children's education and to also explain that we are dual military and our family care plan / emergency contacts. We also ask to volunteer in the school right away so our children see that we too have embraced the PCS and are active in their new school lives. It is difficult to move school districts so often but we embrace the experience as an opportunity for not only for one village but many villages to help us invest in our children's education.

Each move by the family is considered an experience to gain new viewpoints and different perspectives from every school district. On the first day of school, the Jones' have a "massive" dinner, which is chosen by the children. During this dinner the family discusses the first day and highlights about the new school. The success for the children has been and continues to be the connections they make at each school. MAJ Jones shared that they do collect some small "knick-knacks" from duty station to duty station ("refrigerator magnets and/or sports paraphernalia"), but most importantly she believes, "moving to a new school district comes down to finding the best fit available for our children and quickly establishing strong ties with our children's schools".

The Rockatansky Family

The "Rockatansky" family has been highly mobile within their fourteen and a half marriage. MAJOR and Mrs. Rockatasky are a Caucasian family with four children. The children are in Preschool, First grade, Sixth grade, and Seventh grade. Their 6th grader has attended four schools so far, and with their pending move this summer will total his fifth

move in eight formal years of schooling. Mrs. Rockatansky offers the only consistent the military has to offer is that “your plans will likely change”. She says the preparation process for the next duty station begins long before a “Request for Orders” is issued. Mrs.

Rockatansky outlined the early stages of the process for her in the following manner:

The moment I know a move is on the horizon I force my husband into a game of “hypothetical duty station (HDS).” He does not love this game as much as I do. But this part of the process is very important for my sanity. It’s during these months before the Army begins its placement process that we are free to plan our ideal situation. It’s during this time that I feel empowered and in control of my life. Where we move, how long we’re stationed there is all within my sphere of influence. During this time I will spend hours researching at least a couple of potential duty stations. Never once in over 10 years of active duty status have we ever gone to one of the locations I researched during HDS stage.

When their new duty station is selected, Mrs. Rockatasky then establishes a “mileage/time perimeter” around post. She does this because MAJ Rockatansky has been deployed for a total of thirty months of their marriage, which does not include another twenty months or more of military training away from the family. In total, as Mrs. Rockatansky says, that is over four years of their marriage “without her best friend”. This focus on togetherness and a sense of family initially establishes their priority for housing either on post or near post within close proximity.

From housing perimeter research, the next step is researching the school districts within the set perimeter. The main criteria used for selection of a school is the website www.greatschools.org. Mrs. Rockatansky evaluates the rating scores and reads the parent reviews as a comparison of schools in the area. Her experience over their multiple moves with the Internet research strategy has been “spot-on” with numerical ratings and parent reviews based on the schools her children have attended.

Transition is not easy for mobile military families, especially when there is a sense of unknown and eagerness to find out. Mrs. Rockatansky described the family as well grounded and optimistic. She explained that her own attitude sets the tone. She went on to speak to her kids' framework is developed around the context that her and her husband do the following:

We do not allow our children to feel sorry for themselves. They are all well adjusted, well liked and doing well academically. None of them are the most "popular." But everywhere we have lived they have managed to find a few really good friends and that's all any kid needs. I keep conversation flowing during the school year and summer by doing "high and low" at the dinner table. Every night each one of my children must report to the whole family what their high for that day was and what their low was. I find that by stating they have to give a high and low, I learn more about the kids then just asking how their day went from a response of "fine".

Mrs. Rockatansky expanded her discussion on communication by how she has instilled good communication in her children from a young age. She earned her Bachelors of Science in Human Communications with a minor in Human Development. With her focus on communication personally and through her studies, she has a firm belief that it can make or break every relationship. The success of the Rockatansky family centers on family, communication, and a focus on the positive aspects of adventures.

Conclusion

I have provided the storied accounts of the five families with mobility. Each family has their own traditions and practices associated with each move. The themes surfaced through examples and discussion of supports in planning for each transition. In reviewing the narratives and interview transcripts the themes were consistent with what I would predict were important to highly mobile military families. The alignment of the themes made sense structurally from the standpoint of a thought process relative to picking up and moving a

whole family. However, the importance placed on the use of greatschools.org as a research strategy was a surprise that was not expected. Prominently this website became the most influential in gathering feedback on the next duty station families would be assigned. Other than that, there were not other discrepancies in the findings that did not align to the common themes.

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions

In conducting this qualitative study, I began with several questions that I wanted to address surrounding mobile military families and successful strategies that assist children in transition for success in school. The research questions were intended to guide the design of the study and are aligned to the problem and purpose of this narratological case study. Through the collection of personal narratives, parent interviews, and documents/artifacts from five participant families, the questions were answered. The research questions used to bound this study were framed in a ‘how’ and ‘what’ style generic to open-ended questions. Although the experiences associated with military mobility were similar, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed for a broad array of responses for capturing the uniqueness of military mobility for these families. I assert consistencies stemmed from similar experiential strategies for mobility used by the military, even though the location, time, process, and experience may have been vastly different for each family. In the following sections, each question’s answer will be summarized from the holistic themes of *Strategies*, *Identity*, *School/School Choice*, and *Moving/Mobility* that were identified in the data.

Question #1. How do military parents describe their experiences related to family mobility? This first question is complex in its simplicity. To reiterate what Mrs. Goldberg

stated, “Our Motto is attitude is the difference between an ordeal and an adventure”. It was clear as I read the personal narratives, conducted the parent interviews, and collected documents/artifacts that the experiences were what the families make of them. Though moving and mobility posed challenges, concerns, and in some cases anxieties for the unknown in all instances it was clearly verbalized the families were embarking on “new adventures”. As discussed in my review of the literature in chapter two, resiliency of parent and child was paramount. The experiences for each of the families over a period of time were seldom predictable. Though unpredictable, the strategies explained by the families were deep in organization and structure. Since conducting this study, my awareness in conversation with mobile military families that move in and out of Military Unified School District has heightened related to their experiences. The conversations are varied, but quite the same in experiences as well as the attitude surrounding each move. In bringing together their description of experiences related to family mobility, I summarize it as controlling what you can control, and being flexible in situations that may not lend themselves to having control.

Question #2. What strategies do highly mobile military parents identify that assist with student academics in a variety of educational settings? Eloquently, Mrs. Tag says, number one is “word of mouth”, then websites...not “for test scores” but more for reviews and ranking”. Family data on initial strategies to assist with academics unanimously focused on the Internet utilizing websites and/or www.greatschools.org for research. The strategy described in using websites was more prominent than any strategy used in all five families. As a professional educator, I argue whether the data on websites such as this truly reflect the whole picture. In some instances, the assessment data posted on these sites is outdated as

much as five or six years. However, whether these types of sites that score/rank schools are objective or not, mobile military families use them extensively to make decisions. That being said, schools need to recognize this and work to report more recent school ratings. When the families all stated they had used [greatschools.org](https://www.greatschools.org), naturally my curiosity peaked to see where Military Unified School District rated in the county. I was pleased to research that our ratings were as high as the surrounding school districts and in many cases higher. The overall concern was not conveyed that their children will have difficulty or earn low grades, but rather whether the school was a good school for their children. Additionally, parent reviews and information from friends, acquaintances and the use of social media contributed to the strategies used. Main points considered when parents sought to assist with school choice were program offerings, support of military families, access to high quality learning, and a positive environment where the kids can make new friends.

A very prominent point from all five families was a focus on positive experiences wherever they go. One family described it most effectively in describing their strategy of leaving one location focusing on the positives it had to offer. They would experience something in that location prior to moving that may not be available in other locations. This created a personal memory and experience for their proverbial (or actual) memory boxes. Sharing these with friends, who they may cross paths with in the future, made lasting relationships with peers in the same experience of mobility. Additionally, the parents in these five families maintained a deep connection with the school. Through communication (early and often) and volunteering in the schools, parental involvement was a significant component expressed.

Two of five families stated that education is a partnership and that parental involvement in the process was critical. The level of involvement of parents specifically at Military Unified School District is not like most schools. To support this claim I reference my personal signing of “volunteer certificates of Appreciation” every spring. Each school prints off between 150-300 appreciation certificates for me to sign, which represent thirty to sixty percent of the student enrollment numbers of the schools. Based on discussions with my peers regarding parental involvement, the amount of parent volunteers in our schools far exceeds their experiences in the surrounding school districts. This sense of parental involvement and of volunteerism also helps the schools and classrooms too. In a time in public education when funding is decreased and costs are rising, parent volunteers are free help that has everyone focused on the same goal of providing quality academics.

Question #3. What support mechanisms for education do military parents receive to assist with mobility? Within the military supports there is a strong sense of community. The use of social media like Facebook and Twitter have amplified a family’s ability to reach out all across the country and world to receive opinions on school choice, high academic standards and supportive social environments for mobile military connected children. Communication with the receiving school and school staff was stated as supportive because of the willingness of many schools to embrace and support the challenges faced in high mobility. Additional military supports are available through the military duty stations where an active duty service member is assigned. The local School Liaison Officers (SLO’s) serve as a direct conduit between the military installation and the local school districts for families, and in most cases can provide the facts and information necessary for parents to make

informed decisions. Three of the five participant families have utilized the services of the school liaison officers at various duty stations to gather initial information.

It should not be underestimated the role the school staff has in helping mobile military families in transition. Families have told me in previous years that misinformation and/or lack of information causes additional frustration to an already challenging situation. At least three or four families per year share with me their mobility challenges either with the district they just left, or even constructive feedback on the need for more information in my district. Academically, the support necessary to address highly mobile student transition from school to school with varying curriculums is differentiated instruction. The differentiated learning approach of recognizing varying learning styles, knowledge, readiness and interests (Hall, 2002) is a critical support schools must use school wide.

Question #4. What concerns would mobile military families like to see addressed for additional support in transition? The majority of the families participating in this study want to continue to make sure the local school districts maintain up to date information for their schools. With many mobile military families finding out the military orders for their next duty station between late January to early March, parents want to begin to gather as much information as possible. Receiving schools should be receptive and welcoming for all inquiries...because in most cases, the first impression is the lasting impression. Parents want to get a feeling that the school they'll be turning their children over to has a sense of caring, understanding of the mobile military connected child, and academic structures to work with all levels of students in a differentiated instructional framework as was discussed in the chapter two review of the literature. In many instances, school personnel have not experienced the number of relocations that many of their students' have. Mobile Military

families involved in this study shared a common hope for schools and school staff , in that, they need staff to be flexible and compassionate with their children. The children are adjusting, transitioning, and being as resilient as they can. The families participating in this study were clear that they did not want sympathy for their family, rather support for the challenges associated with being a highly mobile military family.

Summary

The complexities surrounding highly mobile military families are extensive. The research gathered in this study highlighted the challenges that are faced and the strategies employed to combat them. The use of the Internet, www.greatschools.org, Facebook, Twitter, and other digital methods of research were the most commonly named strategies through all five families. The data collected is consistent with stories that have been shared with me during my tenure as superintendent of a district with a high concentration of mobile military connected children. The families did not focus on, nor share much about, any major challenges associated with moving. More so, the portrayal of going on adventures and of optimism was most apparent. Throughout the personal narratives and parent interviews, some comments were made regarding the challenges expressed or the feelings shared from the children. But in each instance, it was followed with a strategy or method of adaptability to overcome the hurdle that the parents help their children with to overcome.

In Chapter 5, I share my reflection on the themes highlighted through the data collection with the five families. I will also discuss recommendations for leadership strategies that can be utilized by schools and school districts that can assist with a highly mobile populations. Finally, I discuss recommendations for future research in support of highly mobile military family transitions and academics success.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this narratological case study was to explore strategies that mobile military families in a public school district on military property utilize to assist with academic and social needs, as they transition from duty station to duty station. The challenges and strategies experienced by these families were shared through personal narratives, parent interviews, and the collection of documents/artifacts. In this chapter I will briefly summarize the findings of the research, discuss implications for leadership, share my professional assessment and reflections regarding what this study means for public educators, and provide recommendations for future research.

My excitement regarding this study extends beyond my role as superintendent in a school district educating a large percentage of highly mobile military connected children. My professional role and opportunities in advocating for military-connected children on a national level has made this study a passion for me as well. I serve as President of the Military Impacted Schools Association and also serve on the Board of Directors for the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools for Region IV. My roles in these two national organizations allow for me to work with school districts across the country to advocate for positive school change to include federal level funding. The number of mobile military connected children that I have been associated with over the past 18 years of my career has created an internal drive to provide a semblance of structure for them. I am a

civilian, having never served in any branches of the military. To that end, since I have not served in the military, I believe it necessary to provide as much support as I can in other ways. I feel that if our service-members are putting their lives on the line for my freedom and are in harms way protecting our country, the least I can do is provide leadership that better ensures a stable quality public education for their children. A service-member should not have to worry whether the public education their children are receiving will be the quality it needs to be for preparation of college and career readiness. With my mindset of providing quality education for our mobile military connected children, there are strategies that administrators and staff must employ to assist in all schools. While I will continue to provide structure and resources, coupled with a top-quality educational staff (certified and classified) for our families, administrators in all public schools serving military children must provide the same level of committed support and dedication.

This project, through the time I was able to spend with the parents and in analyzing the data collected, has opened my eyes to the challenges faced by highly mobile military families. I was able to be critical and constructive of what I have in place at Military Unified School District. At the conclusion of this chapter, I discuss implications for future research for a larger body of in military schools, but also implications for improvement within my own district. Until I completed this study and the components associated with detailed qualitative research, I was not acutely aware of the areas in which my district and similar ones can grow structurally and systemically to support our families. The strategies that surfaced from the data in answering the research questions, while not new to me as an administrator, were underestimated for the merit and support they provide to families. Since all five participant families frequently discussed the strategies uncovered in my research, I

assert they are more widespread on a national level given the communication pipeline established through mobile military families. While no formal guidelines or templates for relocation were stated to exist through the military, the consistent process shared through personal narratives, parent interviews and documents/artifacts showed the need for such support. The strategies used by these five families nearly created a template for moving from duty station to duty station in a broad sense. As I discuss leadership implications and opportunities for future research at the end of this chapter, there are opportunities for systemic and organizational change to support mobile military families and the academic success of their children.

Summary of Findings

As I collected and subsequently themed the data, there were consistencies among all five families. While analyzing the results, I found myself at times predicting in my mind what I thought the responses or thoughts would garner in strategies...and other times found myself surprised with the references that were most frequent. When I analyzed the personal narratives, documents/artifacts, and conducted the parent interviews there were a few main strategies that were referenced most frequently, as was discussed in chapter four. These strategies focused on creating smooth transitions from one duty station to another and in supporting the academic progress and achievement of the mobile military-connected child.

Strategy One: Technology Usage

The first strategy the findings uncovered was the use of technology for research and communication. The overarching theme of technology use also included social media. A website specifically mentioned by all families was www.greatschools.org. This website is specifically designed to give parents helpful information to consider when searching for a

school or researching geographic areas for relocation. As stated on their website, the strategic goal of greatschools.org is to “Bring parents better information and insights to help them make great decisions — about schools, learning, and helping their children succeed”. The information is compiled from state departments assessment data as well as patron reviews submitted online. While the previous website was mentioned as the initial launch off point for their research when their duty station was determined, there were other similarly designed websites providing like-services of school district review via the Internet. All five families felt strongly the Internet was the best, quickest, and most thorough opportunity to learn about where they were headed and what the schools were like. Once families narrowed down their search for quality schools to consider, the websites for these schools was the next natural search. In one instance, the family emphatically stated, “greatschools.org is the first thing I look at when we hear we’re moving”.

As I collected and analyzed the data from the participant families as related to this study, it also caused me to evaluate our own practices in Military Unified School District. Through this evaluation process I discovered that even in our own website, we can do a better job of providing easily accessible information and resources for our families being assigned to our duty stations. Knowing this as educators, our prerogative should be in supporting the digital research capabilities of mobile families through district websites that also offer similar information.

Strategy Two: Communication and Parental Involvement

The second strategy of communication and parental involvement was a combination of two factors that coupled together worked quite successfully. Parent involvement in the schools and frequent communication with the staff was dually purposed to keep informed about their children's academic progress, but also to let the students know their parents were supporting their education too. Involved parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, and collaboration with the community (Epstein, 1996) rounded out the strategies under the theme of parental involvement. An empirical study conducted by Ashby (2003) studied the relationship of mother-child as associated with mobility when the father was active duty military (p. 1020). Ashby (2003) concluded, "positive mother-child relationships may reduce children's experiences of loneliness and serve as a buffer against the ill effects of children's experiences of social isolation" (p. 1021). The personal narratives, parent interviews and documents/artifacts that I collected through this study supported this view. The expressed connection and involvement that parents stated were necessary for smooth transitions through many moves and signified the importance of parental involvement and communication with the school and staff. Three of the five families specifically addressed the importance of having "clear and open" communication regularly with the school and more importantly the teachers of their children.

Strategy Three: Positive Attitude and Mentality

The third most frequently mentioned strategy was in maintaining a positive attitude and mentality. This optimism shows resilience to changing situations with frequent moves. Attitude of children about school can be determined by many factors. With mobility as a factor that children must confront, a positive attitude about school could be challenging for a child. In a study conducted by Pekrun, Goetz, and Titz (2002), anxiety in children was

mentioned most often in relation to test anxiety, being in class, and homework (p. 93).

Though the study revealed anxiety in the children studied about school, positive emotions appeared just as often. Pekrun, Goetz, and Titz (2002) reported,

Aside from anxiety, emotions reported most often were enjoyment of learning, hope, pride, and relief, as well as anger, boredom, and shame. In addition, there were accounts of several less frequently reported emotions (e.g., the social emotions of gratitude, admiration, contempt, and envy). (p. 93)

In my review of the literature discussion on resiliency, I presented how children adapted to situations they face by being resilient and bouncing back from adversity. The participant families in this study each discussed the attitudes and positive behaviors of their children. The children continue to exhibit resilient attitudes and behaviors even with high mobility. The adversity they face was in the frequent moves from duty station to duty station and school to school. Not only were the positive attitudes of the children discussed, it was also consistent with all five families that the parents needed to exhibit optimism and a level of excitement so the children knew it would be okay. Even though there is a lot of work and stress involved in the planning and execution of each move from duty station to duty station, the inherent sense of new adventures was common.

Each family participating in this study had two or more kids with at least one in sixth grade. The initial criterion was in having a sixth grader who has moved at least three times since enrolling in school. The significance of why I selected 6th graders having moved at least three times was to highlight children moving almost half of their schooling years since kindergarten, and the experiences parents observed associated with multiple moves.

Unbeknownst to me when developing the criteria, over half of the volunteer families had a 6th grader who had moved schools four or five times (nearly every year of their elementary

school ‘careers’). Those data points alone signify the need to have structures of consistency in place among these families due to frequent mobility.

With the criteria set for family participants, I did not expect the theme of positive attitude to become so prevalent through the data collection process. From my experiences in working with highly mobile military-connected children, I have always had a sense of optimism. However, my assumption about their positive attitude was more in line with the children telling me that moving around so much was okay because they did not have a choice. Through this study, positivity expressed was genuine and a part of the strategies families focused on for smooth transition. Highlighting the positive of each duty station and each new school as an adventure was not an attempt to put mind over matter...it was true positive expression towards change.

Leadership Implications

As I briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, leadership and school staff also play a key role in the success of our mobile military-connected students. The strategies outlined in the findings are things the parents have utilized to ensure success of their children while facing frequent mobility. There is also responsibility on the schools to provide high level of support and leadership to minimize the effects of mobility on academic success. The leadership implications surrounding schools and districts with a high concentration of active duty military may look different than a typical public school. Military personnel work for perfection, maintain structure, are rich in history and tradition, and want to make sure their children are getting the best education possible. In some instances, military personnel in the officer ranks can be more persistent in making sure their children get what they should. In the district that is the focus of this study, student discipline has not historically been much of

a problem. All students are raised with a sense of respect for authority and each other. However, in a small number of situations, assertion of soldier rank has been used to attempt to change the outcome of the issue. I cite one example of a discipline issue when I was a building level principal several years ago. Two students got into a physical altercation in the cafeteria. Their fight was over name calling and rumors being spread. One of the students was the child of a Sergeant and the other student's father was a Lieutenant Colonel. Both students received equivalent out of school suspensions for their equal roles in the fight. However, the officer father was very upset that his son received the same discipline because he felt his son's role was less and that because he was a Lieutenant Colonel his son should get a break. My response back to the father was that his son doesn't have military rank, and in my school setting, the father is "Mr." when it comes to issues at school because all soldiers (regardless of rank) and their children are dealt with fairly based on situations. This example is provided as a means to give insight as to the structures and leadership necessary to maintain an environment that is conducive to learning for all students.

Leadership should be the role of all staff members. For example, teachers play a critical role in the lives of their students. Teacher leaders make an impact on their students, their peers, and the school. Linda Lambert (2003) defines teacher leaders as those teachers who are:

Reflective, inquisitive, focused on improving their craft, and action oriented; they accept responsibility for student learning and have a strong sense of self. They know their intentions well enough not to be intimidated into silence by others, are open to learning, and understand the three dimensions of learning in schools: student learning, the learning colleagues, and learning on their own. (p. 33)

The previous definition describes a well-rounded teacher but more specifically addresses the key component of taking responsibility for student learning. As one of the participant families described it, it takes a village to raise a child. The schools are a major part of the village. Revealed during the parent interviews, it was stated by a participant that they expect the school, staff and leadership to take responsibility for educating their children. This stated responsibility was due to the child spending over seven hours a day in the school and the school staff watching out for them educationally, socially, and emotionally.

If the responsibility for student improvement rests solely on that of the teachers or teacher leaders, that requires school staff and administration to operate as an effective Professional Learning Community. As DuFour and Marzano (2011) describe PLC's as "an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (p. 22). In districts where effective leadership focuses on bottom-up versus top-down, the superintendent works with the board of education, other central office administration and building leadership to set student achievement goals for the district and schools (DuFour and Marzano, 2011). But as said by one of the families participating in this study, it "takes a community to raise a child". The community must be dedicated to the students, to the parents, and to each other. The growth, expansion, and success of learning organizations must include the concept of transformational leadership. According to Bass (2000),

Transformation leaders raise the awareness of their constituencies about what is important, increase concerns for achievement, self-actualization, and ideals. They move followers to go beyond their own self-interests for the good of the group, organization or community, country or society as a whole. (p. 21)

Building and district administration hold a critical role in developing structure, supporting positive change agents and ideas, and leading out front, while knowing when to support from the back. As discussed by Bass (2001) transformational leadership very closely aligns with that of servant leadership. The leader needs “vision, influence, credibility, trust, and service” (p. 33) combining the servant leadership that puts the needs of the organization and others before oneself.

School district administrators must work for change to address challenges faced in schools. The challenge addressed in this study centered on frequent mobility in military families. Change, whether it is individually driven or organizationally directed, can be seen as resistance to current practice. Educational leadership may implement change with an intent to shake things up, to motivate, or to move away from status quo. I have been guilty in my leadership positions of directing change to situations that may have not required change. In self-reflection after certain decisions, I determined that I had not looked deep enough in to the root of the issue/problem enough to see if adjustment was necessary or refocus would have served the purpose effectively. That being said, it was not a surprise when the changes were met with resistance. Ford, Ford, and D’Amelio (2008) state,

Resistance is a form of conflict. And since conflict has been found to strengthen and improve not only the quality of decisions but also participants’ commitments to the implementation of those decisions, it stands to reason that resistance can provide a similar strengthening value during change. (p. 369)

Administration working collaboratively with teachers to create a structure by which instructional practices are focused on the desired and agreed upon outcomes will generate the results established by the team. Reeves (2009) states, “Effective change does not happen

with seminars and speeches, but with effective and repeated practice of the professional behaviors that you expect to change” (p. 48).

In coordination with familial strategies for the parents to help their children during mobility, school staff and especially administration must provide support and open communication. In dealing with high turnover annually in Military Unified School District, there is a critical need to figure out new ways to support our mobile military-connected children for academic success. School/District leadership taking charge allows for well-rounded support for the parents to focus on their strategies for moving.

Future Research

There is more work to be done on this limited body of research. As described earlier in this study, one of my named limitations was in the sampling group. In requesting participants from over one hundred forty sixth graders in the district, the response rate was lower than expected for participants and only included those families with one or more parents having a rank of officer. This limitation was in part due to the enlisted families with a sixth grader at Military Unified School District not meeting the minimum criteria of a least three moves from kindergarten to sixth grade because of permanent party assignments (typically three years in one location). Future research should expand on this study by gathering data from more military installations and including those families with a parent or parents that hold one of the enlisted ranks. To assure expanded research includes a wider body of participants than volunteered for this study, future research should include expanded categories of : Race/Ethnicity; Gender; Single-parent Active duty; students with disabilities; families in which the mother is the active duty sponsor; dual military; and families where the active duty soldier is a geographic bachelor (geo bachelor). Geographic bachelor is a term

referred to by military personnel to describe a soldier who has temporarily relocated to his/her next duty station without the family. This allows the family stability in their current duty station location and decreases an additional family move. In instances where there is a geo bachelor decision made, it usually means the soldier knows the duration of the duty station assignment may be for only one year. In expanding the research to include the previously recommended topics, this will give a well-rounded data collection as to additional strategies mobile military families could implement across a wider field of research and family dynamics for success moves from one duty station to the next.

The implications of future research will broaden the opportunities for strategies to be implemented in school districts that have a high mobility rate that may not include military connected children. Through my review of the literature for this study, there was a larger body of research surrounding academic performance of transient children not associated with military. Figure 1 from chapter one illustrates the need for continued research that compares academic progress for mobile military connected children. The most recent data gathered through this research is eighteen years old, and desperately needs updating for current statistics. Though the data in Figure 1 shows mobile military-connected children are less affected by mobility than their non-military counterparts, the data still remains outdated. While the data showed lower academic performance of non-military transient students, there was not a discussion or body of empirical research studies that provided strategies to assist in improving their academic success. I believe firmly that if educators and researchers are able to identify several factors associated with poor academic performance of highly mobile children, then there should also be a greater focus on determining successful strategies to

combat the effect of transience on academics followed by an implementation model that will serve as a guide for schools and school systems.

The results of this study shared a common theme of the critical role parents and administration play in protecting the educational challenges that mobile military children will face with each move. Working in tandem understanding collaboration is essential, success will be inevitable. When schools, school districts, and administrators understand and emphasize the critical role schools have in assisting highly mobile military connected children, I believe we will begin to see a structure and implementation of educational best-practices that erase the barriers caused by frequent relocation. A launch off point for me as superintendent of Military Unified School District will be in surveying our families on highlights, deficiencies, and district practices that need to be in place to assist their research and information gathering that is a crucial part of their process preparing for relocation. If other school districts develop a reflective process by which parents can provide constructive feedback, I believe groundwork will be laid to structure greater assistance.

Final Reflections

As I read and reread my presented dissertation as well as the data collected, I was increasingly transformed to a greater focus on the problem addressed in this study. While I have felt that my leadership of Military Unified School District supports our highly mobile military families, the amazing staff employed in the district, and the students we are fortunate to educate annually, this study has opened my eyes to areas in which I see the need for personal and organizational growth. My reflection from this process has uncovered what I believe has been continued focus on our progress, but not a transformational focus that I should be leading for greatest potential to surface.

I am truly fortunate to have a dedicated staff that works for individual student achievement because they recognize their students may be in Military Unified School District for a short period of time compared to non-military students. We focus on curriculum resources that not only engage students but also create an academic baseline for their future schooling years. To that end, and somewhat contradictory, the curriculum resources in our school district may be vastly different than where the students just came from or where they will be going. I unknowingly and unwittingly have taken for granted the potential impact of fluctuating curriculum on mobile military connected children. Now reflecting on this, we must utilize resources and assessments for continuous evaluation and measurement of the academic progress of our students. In many instances, educators (including me) have relied heavily on the quantitative data that is collected to drive systemic decision-making. From this study, I give equal or greater credence to the value of qualitative data gathering and analysis in the growth process. Until I was able to read the personal narratives, review the documents/artifacts, and conduct the in-person parent interviews, I did not realize the true emotion and dedication to success of the family and child our mobile military families had as a way of normal being.

I am thankful for the transparency, honesty, constructive feedback, and praise the participants expressed through this process. It was inspiring to know these families will continue to be their children's best advocates for transition and learning...and we as school district staff and administration can and do play a critical role throughout each move from duty station to duty station. I look forward to implementing specific communicative and support strategies as outlined in the findings of this study. My work will continue to assist

and educate other school districts serving mobile military populations to address the same challenges I have discussed.

APPENDIX A

Narrative Story Prompt (Written reflection):

In your own words related to personal experience, describe for me in writing the details, planning and execution of the move from one duty station to the next. Please begin your reflection from when military orders are received (or prior to that if it helps build the story) to the first day of school for your child (before, during and after you are settled in the new location).

APPENDIX B

Parent Interviews on transition from school to school:

1. When you first learn of your move to a new duty station, related to your child's education, what is the first thing you do?
2. What criteria do you use to determine if the school your child will attend is a good school?
3. How do you introduce the new school to your child while still at the current duty station, in advance of arriving?
4. Are there any strategies you use to help your child feel comfortable with the location and school you'll be moving to?
5. When you arrive to the new duty station, what do you do to introduce your child to the new school and community?
6. Are there any "lessons learned" that you make sure not to do with each move that you've experienced or heard of as making things more difficult?

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Keith Mispagel was born on April 30, 1972 in Denver, Colorado. He was educated in local public and private schools and graduated from Englewood High School in Englewood, CO in 1990. He attended Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, where he studied Elementary Education and played baseball. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from Benedictine College and graduated in 1995.

In the fall of 1997, he continued his education at Benedictine College in Atchison, KS by pursuing a Master's Degree in Educational Administration (MEA). He graduated with his MEA in 2000. As he continued working in the education field as an elementary principal, Mr. Keith Mispagel pursued his Educational Specialist Degree (EdS) at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in Kansas City, MO in 2002. In 2003, he earned his EdS from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, School of Education, which also included district level administration licensure.

Beginning in 2005, Mr. Mispagel was promoted to Deputy Superintendent of which he served five years. In 2005, he also began the pursuit of his Interdisciplinary Ph.D. at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, School of Education in Educational Administration and Curriculum and Instruction. In 2010, Mr. Mispagel was promoted to superintendent of schools, and still serves in that role.

Upon completion of his degree requirements in spring 2016, Mr. Mispagel plans to continue his career as superintendent at Fort Leavenworth School District educating children of active duty soldiers assigned to Fort Leavenworth Military Installation.