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Ready, Eager, & Well-Prepared: A mantra for military personnel and teachers

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Ready, Eager & Well-Prepared: ♦ A MANTRA FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL AND TEACHERS

It is a scene which most Armed Services personnel can recall with great detail. The stage is a training room on a military installation. Conversations about an upcoming exam intermingle with discussions about sports and fill the air of the room. The camaraderie of the soldiers provides a nervous distraction from the individual plots about to unwind for each soldier. Over the course of the next several days, one-by-one, the soldiers will open their first set of orders. The first post or base assignments which will follow their technical training are scheduled to be distributed in the upcoming days.



Excitement and self-assurance are evident among the members of the training class. Yet, a certain level of anxiety looms as a backdrop to the concluding days of their technical preparation. Questions cast an ever-so-slight shadow on their confidence. Where will they be sent? Will they be able to adjust to the new post?

Once the soldiers receive their assignments, the anxiety and questions so prevalent only days, even hours earlier, are replaced with determination to learn as much as possible about where they are going. The soldiers read and re-read the official information in their relocation packets. Search engines hum. Texts, Tweets, and Facebook posts elicit information about the places they are going and people with whom they will work. Empowered with this knowledge, the service members began to form the connections that will allow them not only to meet the demands of their assignment, but to excel in the critical work which faces them.

In a similar scene, in a university classroom across the country, the actors and actresses are college students who are preparing to become teachers. They discuss their latest exam and plan weekend activities. The collegiality is evident as is the anticipation

Artwork by Whitney, Grade 12 | Hohenfels Middle High School, Hohenfels, Germany | U.S. Army

of what will soon be happening. Within days, they will receive their first assignments to work in K-12 schools.

Like the soldiers, these pre-service teachers have completed the initial steps of their pedagogical training and are prepared, albeit a bit apprehensive, to apply what they have learned in a “real-world” setting. In the case of the pre-service teachers, the “real word” is a PK-12 classroom. They wonder where their university might assign them and if they will acclimate to the culture of the schools where they will complete their first clinical field experiences.

Upon receipt of their assignments, the pre-service teachers feverishly seek information. Just as soldiers use personal resources and official relocation packets to answer questions, so do the pre-service teachers. They talk with friends, question professors, access technology, and pour over official information from their university to assist them in learning about their upcoming assignments. This information will be crucial for them to meet the demands of their assignments and excel in the critical work which faces them, the ability to connect with each child in their classrooms.

Increasingly, teacher preparation programs are recognizing the need to better prepare pre-service teachers for their initial assignments. While these programs have always provided preparation related to child development, instructional strategies, and classroom management, most teacher training programs now recognize that pre-service teachers must understand the social context of their students, particularly given the amount of diversity in today's K-12 classrooms. **To be effective, the pre-service teachers should recognize not only the challenges but the opportunities of a diverse classroom** (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

The diversity found in K-12 schools enters classrooms from all angles. Cultural, racial, religious, and socio-economic diversity add to the richness and challenges found within American classrooms. Military-connected students, those students with one or both parents in the military, also contribute to the diversity of K-12 schools. Although each military-connected student is wonderfully unique, research indicates commonalities (Nansook, 2011) among these students that may impact academic performance. For pre-service teachers, an awareness of these shared attributes will help them create connections and relationships needed to effectively teach military-connected student.

A small number of teacher preparation programs (just over 100) has initiated intentional efforts to assist pre-service teachers in recognizing the diversity which military-connected students bring into countless K-12 classrooms in all parts of the United States. These pre-service teacher preparation programs have accepted the challenge of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) to make concerted efforts to provide information, professional development, and clinical experiences which build pre-service teachers' capacity to provide educational support to military-connected students and their families.

AACTE and MCEC have partnered to form Operation Educate the Educators. The mission of this collaboration is to champion the military-connected student by providing information, resources, and networking opportunities to the nation's teacher educators and the pre-service teachers who are their students.

The pre-service teachers are hungry for this information. Their training has taught them to understand the value of establishing relationships with each individual student. They also know that to form these connections, they must know the opportunities and challenges of working with various groups of students.

So as the scenes in the training room and the university classroom draw to a close, the soldiers and pre-service teachers now informed of what lies ahead, exit the stage ending the first act. The curtains soon rise signaling the beginning of the next act and revealing the new scenery. The characters enter the scene ready, eager, and well-prepared.

