Emergency Educational Frameworks for Evacuees: Lessons from the 'Swords of Iron' War

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This paper, based on interviews with eleven school principals, analyses the new schools established for evacuee students during the Swords of Iron war, in an effort to identify strengths and challenges and form recommendations for future emergencies. The analysis is broken down into three chronological stages: establishment, stabilization and the emergency daily routine.

The **first chapter** reviews the various educational frameworks set up for the evacuees and their development.

The **second chapter** details the successes, while the third chapter discusses the dilemmas and challenges that arose.

The **final chapter** lays out the recommendations.

Summary:

With the outbreak of the "Swords of Iron" war and the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilians from their homes for months on end, evacuee children and adolescents were absorbed into the educational frameworks of wherever they were evacuated to. The lack of an organized evacuation plan, including the establishment and management of educational frameworks for the evacuees, accompanied by the fact that the residents of numerous cities and towns were dispersed throughout the country, paved the way for improvisations and on-the-ground initiatives.

This research identified several points of unequivocal success:

➢ The initiative and commitment of school principals, both salaried and volunteer, the managerial autonomy they were given and the many volunteers who came to their aid;

➢ The commitment and dedication of the teachers who returned to teaching;

➢ The community resilience;

> ➤ The accountability of certain local authorities and their creativity in finding suitable structures for the schools to operate in.

Alongside these, some challenges and difficulties were identified as well:

> ➤ *Disorganized evacuation.* The dispersal of the population and the resultant educational discontinuity created difficulties in the distribution of budgets between the original schools and the new frameworks, as well as the transmission of vital information between the two. The dispersal separated evacuated students from evacuated teachers, making it difficult for the displaced teachers to return to work and necessitating the recruitment of many additional teachers.

> ➤ *Student dropouts.* The displaced students' absorption was very difficult due to their dislocation from familiar communities and teachers, on top of the need for them to integrate into a new and alien environment –often unsuited to evacuee needs. Moreover, the lack of organized information about the evacuees and a shortage of therapeutic staff made it difficult for schools and professionals to identify and respond to the needs of student dropouts.

> ➤ *Manpower.* The low salaries that the Ministry of Education allowed educational frameworks to offer new teachers made it difficult to recruit and retain teaching staff. Other difficulties were the bureaucracy involved in recruiting personnel and the fact that there was no clear demand from the Ministry of Education for teachers to return to work in order to continue to receive pay.

> ➤ *Responsibility for the Schools.* The evacuees' school principals were not clear on what budgets were available to them and what agencies they were meant to answer to – the evacuated local authority, the point of absorption's local authority, or the Ministry of Education.

> ➤ *Structures and Logistics.* Some schools were forced to make do with inappropriate facilities, such as company offices. Moreover, since the students' meal allowances were transferred directly to the hotels, many principals were forced to shorten the school day considerably in order to allow the students to eat breakfast and lunch in their hotel.

Recommendations:

It is necessary to devise a plan of evacuation that takes into account the critical need for continuity of original educational frameworks, and determines which local authorities are most suitable and ready to receive others designated for evacuation. If

the evacuation is rushed, community consolidation should be facilitated in the second stage.

Displaced communities' original schools must be re-established for the sake of educational and functional continuity, and to facilitate control and provide the proper response for each student. An emergency visitation corps should be established to locate and support dropout students. Budgets should be transferred to organizations that work for at-risk youth to support evacuated adolescents.

A pool of emergency administrators and educators should be established by the authorities expected to absorb evacuees. This pool should include retired or on-sabbatical principals and be duly updated at specified intervals. In addition, student teachers in the advanced years of their degree should be recruited, and their work (aided by guidance and instruction) recognized as part of their practical obligations to the completion of their degree.

A procedure should be published regarding the orderly return to work of evacuated teachers. The procedure should include the definition of a brief period of reorganization, after which each teacher will decide whether to return to work or go on unpaid leave. This procedure will exempt teachers who have suffered personal loss or been directly affected by the emergency, and will allow for various accommodations and incentives in accordance with the challenges at hand.

Every municipal area that is a potential absorption destination for evacuees should be mapped for places where emergency schools can be established. Mapping should include public utility buildings the normal function of which is educational – '*matnas*' and '*pais*' community centers, teachers' training institutions and the like.

Explore the option of partially transferring meal budgets from the hotels to the school principals so students can eat at school, or conversely, allow schools to package meals in the evacuee students' hotels and transport them to the school for the students.

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