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# The experiences of redeployed educators from down-sized schools

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The process of redeployment is viewed in this article from the perspective of the theory of managerialism in order to explain why educational institutions change. Redeployment is seen as part of the transformation process. Redeployment victims suffer a syndrome characterised by feelings of loss, anxiety, anger, insecurity, mistrust and stress. This syndrome is described by means of empirical data. The article compares arguments from theoretical propositions and integrates them with the data drawn from empirical investigation. While redeployment has succeeded in distributing educators across the education system, it has also brought misery to the careers of some educators, especially those who have experienced the process first-hand.

## Die ervaring van herontplooiende opvoeders by terugge-snoeide skole

In hierdie artikel word die prosesse van herontplooiing vanuit 'n bestuursteoretiese perspektief benader ten einde te verduidelik waarom opvoedkundige inrigtings verander. Herontplooiing word gesien as deel van die transformasieproses. Die slagoffers van herontplooiing ly aan 'n sindroom wat gekenmerk word deur 'n gevoel van verlies, ang, aggressie, wantroue en stres. Hierdie simptome wat die sindroom van die slagoffers beskryf, kom van empiriese ingesamelde data. In die artikel word argumente van teoretiese proposisies vergelyk en geïntegreer met die data wat uit die empiriese ondersoek verkry is. Terwyl met herontplooiing daarin geslaag is om opvoeders oor die sisteem heen te versprei, het dit ook ongelukkigheid veroorsaak in die loopbane van sommige opvoeders, veral diegene wat die prosesse eerstehands ondervind het.

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The South African education system has been involved in a process of restructuring as part of the general social transformation. Restructuring refers to “hard” structural interventions ranging from the development of new organisations, the redeployment of personnel, and the introduction of new information to the alteration of lines of accountability and management (Wooldridge & Cranke 1995: 343). The organisational structure provides the basic framework within which policies and direction are formulated and implementation takes place.

In the public education sector, restructuring involves the inherited sub-systems of the former Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC), six former self-governing homelands and the three national departments of Education and Culture (DEC), National Education (DNE) and Education and Training (DET), each formerly serving a specific racial group. The DEC also comprised four provincial education departments and the DET seven regional offices (McLennan 1995: 525). The challenge facing the new Department of Education was thus not simply one of finding and creating the right provincial and national structures to accommodate these subsystems, but of ensuring that both management practices and the distribution of resources become equitable — particularly in view of the historical context of apartheid, with its racially skewed provision of resources. The equitable distribution of resources, and in particular human resources or educators, implies that educators who are deemed superfluous at their existing schools, according to new learner-educator ratio agreements, have to be redeployed to schools where there is a shortage of educators (Moulder 1992: 163).

The schooling system operated according to a racial hierarchy involving unequal provision of educators as well as regional differences and gender inequalities (Hofmeyer & McLennan 1992: 175-80). Thus excess educators were moved from one particular school to another, and from one region or province to another (Herman 1998: 52). Table 1 below shows that 24 186 educators had been redeployed by late 2000 and 12 063 were still to be redeployed.

Table 1: Statistical information on rationalisation and redeployment as at 30 September 2000

Province	Total number of educator posts created by the MEC	Number of educators declared in excess	Number of educators re-deployed	Number of educators still in excess	Number of vacant posts	Possible number of educators who cannot be redeployed
E Cape	68 863	10 289	7 730	2 559	2 942	666
N Cape	6 963	214	125	89	307	39
W Cape	25 629	2 038	1 184	854	1 036	805
Gauteng	46 917	3 885	3 516	369	4 000	Possibly none
Free State	23 945	1 377	995	382	329	Possibly none
Mpumalanga	26 535	896	852	44	1 412	33
North-West	28 527	5 589	1 847	3 742	1 324	2 418
KwaZulu-Natal	68 742	7 338	6 694	644*	1 000	Possibly none
Limpopo	51 861	4 623	1 243	3 380	5 166	Unknown
Total	347 982	36 249	24 186	12 063	17 516	3 961

\* In KZN, of the 644 educators in excess, 66 are from schools and 578 are from Colleges of Education (52 199) (Dept of Education 2000: 96).

Moving educators from one school to another can be problematic for them as their families live near to their jobs, and they are socialised within particular organisational cultures. A change in their circumstances can cause serious imbalances in their lives and their careers. The concept of redeployment has brought a new dimension to job security (Ambrose 1996: 6). That is, a job for life is no longer a reality in the public sector. Employees can no longer regard their employment as permanent and offer commensurate loyalty. Whatever the cause, widespread insecurity, mistrust, and work-related stress are affecting “down-sized” educators. This article will attempt to identify and analyse the experiences of educators with regard to redeployment.

## 1. Research strategy

The object of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of redeployed educators, by listening to them relate their experiences from their own perspectives. In order to integrate factual data and the subjective experiences of those directly involved in the phenomenon, a qualitative approach was decided on.

The redeployed educators' patterns of behaviour, customs and conduct in their workplaces were also investigated. Although observation was not used as the main instrument of data collection, it was applied to complement interviews. A combination of these strategies resulted in rich data.

Interviews were used as a research method to collect information on the research question: What are the experiences of educators with regard to redeployment? This question also invites a qualitative research approach, since qualitative methods are advantageous when the research goal is to describe the incidence or experience of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context. Interviews are also useful when dealing with technically distinctive situations in which there are more variables of interest than data points. For this reason, a case study design was chosen.

The interviews were open-ended. The respondents were asked the following questions about their experiences of redeployment:

- Do you think proper procedures were followed in the redeployment process?
- Why were you redeployed?
- Do you think proper procedures were followed to absorb educators in excess?
- After your experience of redeployment, do you think you still have job security?
- After being redeployed, how do you feel towards your former school principal, your former colleagues and your trade union?
- After being redeployed, are you able to plan ahead?
- Do your new colleagues accept you?
- Are you satisfied with your new school?
- What do you think should be the crucial point when redeploying educators?
- Are measures in place to support you in your new school or new role(s)?

Non-probability sampling was used to select ten educators from primary and secondary schools in the Southern Region of the Limpopo province through purposeful sampling. Information about individual educators was collected and synthesised with theoretical propositions. However, for clarity, their responses will be quoted separately.

Data from the interviews was analysed by means of the framework set out below. This analytical technique permits the researcher to “tell like it is”. Data was collected in an unstructured manner. Much information was collected by means of semi-structured interviews whose questions did not attempt to shape the informants’ responses. For this reason, a systematic process was required in order to analyse the data. The following steps were taken:

1. Getting a sense of the whole. I read through all of the transcriptions carefully. In some cases I jotted down ideas as they came to mind.
2. Assessing the meaning of each transcript. After reading each one I asked myself the question — what is this about?
3. Clustering similar topics together. After reading each transcript and establishing its meaning I wrote down a topic summarising that meaning.
4. Turning descriptive topics into categories. I grouped topics that were related to one another. The categories were analysed to establish the interrelationships.
5. Reduction. I shortened the final categories and coded them as follows:
  - (a) Understanding of redeployment procedures.
  - (b) Attitudes and feelings towards
    - i. former school principal
    - ii. former colleagues
    - iii. trade union.
  - (c) Planning ahead.
  - (d) Acceptance by new colleagues.
  - (e) Satisfaction with new school.
  - (f) Future redeployment.

This approach to data analysis seemed suited to the research approach adopted in this article because it allowed me to make simultaneous use of the relevant evidence from the documents and the responses from interviewees.

## 2. Conceptualisation

### 2.1 Redeployment

The process of redeployment was viewed from the perspective of the theory of managerialism to explain why educational institutions change. For this reason redeployment is seen here as part of transformation in the education system. As a process, redeployment is on-going and continuous. Legal documents explain redeployment as indicating transfer for operational requirements (cf Department of Education Labour Relations Act No 66 of 1995, Schedule 8, Item 2(2) (RSA 1995); Personnel Administration Measures (PAM) (Dept of Education 1998: B2.4) and Education Labour Relations Council Resolution 5 of 1998) (ELRC 1998). These documents prescribe procedures for the transfer of educators for operational reasons.

According to PAM (Dept of Education 1998: B 2.4(b)) redeployment is carried out to effect equity in staff provisioning and does not result in declaring educators as redundant and to be retrenched (Beckmann *et al* 2000: 130). Various terms are used to describe redeployment: right-sizing, streamlining, consolidating, de-massification, reshaping, re-engineering, reorganising, down-sizing, and restructuring (Ambrose 1996: 8).

Throughout this article the term redeployment will be used broadly to refer to the strategic act of reducing the size of an educational institution's workforce by means of transfers (Beckmann *et al* 2000: 128-34). Redeployment does not actually involve layoffs or other forms of attrition of personnel. It simply involves a freeze on hiring and a transfer of excess educators from one educational institution to another. Rather than being a chance occurrence, like mass attrition due to an organisational decline, down-sizing is a management manoeuvre undertaken either pro-actively, in anticipation of educational demands, or reactively, in the face of any of the following: changes in learner enrolment; curriculum changes within a specific educational institution; changes in the grading of a specific educational institution, or financial constraints.

When we think of the human toll taken by redeployment, we tend to focus on the survivors. We empathise with them on their resultant overload. This article argues that, like the survivors, the redeployed edu-

cators suffer from a syndrome revealed by this research. It suggests that they are locked in a co-dependent relationship which must be remedied if their condition is to improve. Before discussing the findings, the role played by the unions in the redeployment process will be considered. This is important because the purpose of trade unions is to protect the workers, and they are therefore important role players in the process of down-sizing and redeployment.

## 2.2 The role of the trade unions

Analysis of the labour relationship reveals that the power of an individual employee is insufficient to effect substantive change in educational institutions. Moreover, employment conditions are not negotiated in the institutions. Educators protect themselves against arbitrary decisions by employers through trade unions (Nel *et al* 1998: 92). Trade unions defend their members' interests and improve their working conditions (Sinclair 1999: 135). By acting together as a collective unit educators can achieve far more than they could ever hope to achieve individually (Levy 1992: 78; Bendix 1989: 41). The new labour dispensation allows for worker participation in areas relating to employment and personnel matters (ILO 1981: 24). The process of redeployment is fraught with problems emanating from different interpretations created by personal histories, experiences, purposes and interests. As a result some provisions of legislation are selected, ignored, misunderstood and subjectively interpreted. Because of the principle of decentralisation, individual regions and even schools have their own interpretations (Davies 1999: 60). Therefore, trade unions play an important role in educating their members about employment law in general, and redeployment in particular. Trade union participation thus reduces inherent contradictions and tensions. The redeployment concessions obtained in the ELRC are, in fact, important protection concessions won for all educators irrespective of whether they are members of trade unions or not (Joubert & Prinsloo 2000: 189).

The role of trade unions in protecting workers is pursued through co-operation with school managers. The question is, how do trade unions influence redeployment policy? They influence employment legislation through corporatism, which may be defined as a system of interest representation in which constituent units are organised into a limited

number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls (Pretorius 1996: 203).

This definition raises questions about the role played by trade unions in protecting workers. More and more compromises are made, some of which do not favour the workers. In the case of redeployment, close scrutiny reveals that while it brought suffering to some affected individuals, it has long-term benefits for educators. These benefits are wide-ranging but this article will consider retention as one such benefit. It would be short-sighted to think of redeployment as a defeat by management. Such a view emanates from the notion that trade union leaders are integrated into management functions (Maree 1992: 249), toeing the line of the employer rather than protecting the workers. Swanepoel *et al* (1999: 10) contend that the trade-offs between labour and the employer are influenced by the needs to create social consensus in order to provide a stability which can lead to economic stability; to democratise workplaces, and to follow the required protocol. Thus, workers sacrifice their rights for societal stability and economic growth. Corporatism seems less beneficial to the workers in the short term, but is very important for the long-term benefits gained through co-operation with employers in a bargaining council.

The constituent units mentioned in the discussion above critique the role of trade unions in bargaining councils. The primary function of bargaining councils is to regulate the sectors of employment over which they have jurisdiction and they are established as an application of labour laws by one or more registered trade unions and one or more registered employers' organisations as well as the State, if it is an employer in the sector (Squelch 1999: 93). Bargaining councils in the public education sector include the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSSBC) and the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC).

Trade unions such as the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), the National Association of Professional Teachers of South Africa (NAPTOSA) and the Suid-Afrikaanse OnderwysUnie (SAOU) are all parties to the ELRC, according to Resolution 6 of 1998, which invoked redeployment with the aim of redistributing educators among schools but not retrenching them. However, this resolution does not



guarantee job security for all excess educators. For instance, educators who unreasonably refuse to be redeployed are not entitled to severance pay and are deemed to have resigned. This provision is problematic because the personal circumstances of educators do not seem to be taken into consideration (Ambrose 1996). Thus, the procedures prescribed in the resolution protect the system, but not the educator.

### 3. Findings

The framework (unit of meanings) outlined above has facilitated in organising the analysis of the findings. A two-pronged general analytic strategy has been used for data analysis. One strategy relies on theoretical propositions and the other begins with a presentation of the findings. The discussion will follow the presentation of the findings.

#### 3.1 Understanding of redeployment procedures

Redeployment is a continuous process which takes a psychological toll on the educator, survivors and the school. Redeployed educators lose their position and must rebuild their careers. They worry about their future importance to the organisation. Hence one interviewee wrote:

I am not certain of anything. This seems a short cut to retrenchment. I fear to be in excess again in my new school.

However, another interviewee viewed redeployment differently and was more positive about the process. His/her situation had improved and s/he was happy about the process, writing:

I am still the employee of the department with all benefits enjoyed by all employees. My situation is much better than when I was still in excess. After being moved I am now certain of my position. Nothing has changed. I am working permanently.

It appears that others remain in the dark about their positions, as their responses indicate that the process did not go well or was incomplete:

I don't have job security. My particulars are still attached to my previous school. So, one may be returned to one's former school.

Not yet. The process may be reversed as the method to permanently absorb educators is still to be negotiated.

## 3.2 Attitudes and feelings

Everyone suffers initially after redeployment and restructuring. This is normal. The real trauma of redeployment cannot be minimised. Careers change, families struggle, and the victims suffer loss of prestige and security (Ambrose 1996: 34-45). Employees feel they have been wronged by an organisation that lured them with the promise of career possibilities and a reliable livelihood. They suffer a syndrome including shock and denial, grief and anger, ambivalence and guilt, fear and distrust, disillusionment and demotivation, feelings of being unappreciated or undervalued, and excess stress.

### 3.2.1 Towards the principal

The most predictable symptom of the redeployed educator syndrome is a loss of trust in management. The victims responded by questioning three aspects of the process:

- competence - "Do they know what they are doing?"
- benevolence - "Do they care about its impact on us?"
- integrity - "Are they acting in a consistently honest, principled way? Are they telling us the truth?"

These responses indicate that the principals involved did not follow proper procedures. The victims have probably lost faith in them, as is reflected in the following comments:

After being redeployed I have a negative attitude towards the principal and the inspector. They don't have our best interests at heart. They don't know what they are doing. They are not telling us the truth.

### 3.2.2 Towards former colleagues

The victims of redeployment may be locked in a dependent relationship. Working with others has helped them to establish relationships with colleagues but redeployment interferes with these relationships. Consequently, such workers can no longer define themselves in terms of their connection with others. As a result, they experience low morale and rage, compounded by insecurity. This is echoed in the following response:

After being redeployed I am not on good terms with some of my former colleagues. I think they have betrayed me. I used to love to come to work, but now it's just a job.

The victims suffer the pain of loss and as a result they put an emotional distance between themselves and the estranged entity for which they work.

### 3.2.3 Towards trade unions

Workers believe that a trade union should protect them against exploitation by their employers. However, trade unions have become participants in the process by means of agreements reached in the bargaining councils. But despite being party to the redeployment process, trade unions may intervene in that process if they feel that their members have been treated unfairly or unreasonably (Smit & Grobler 1998: 32). Such an intervention may be effected by the site steward, who is particularly involved in the day-to-day problems that arise in educational institutions (Nel *et al* 1998: 94-6; Levy 1992: 78-82). However, it appears that trade unions are doing very little about local realities. This is reflected in the following comment:

I fail to understand how my union reached this kind of agreement.  
I think the union is failing to protect us while I am contributing  
R20,00 every month for membership.

This comment points to the fact that because of corporatism, trade unions are probably focusing more on societal interests than on the workers' bread-and-butter issues. Perhaps the rank-and-file do not understand the purpose of the agreement.

## 3.3 Planning ahead

The interviewees were asked whether, after being redeployed, they were able to plan ahead? One interviewee commented:

There is nothing to plan ahead. It is difficult, confusing and frustrating. My spirit is low and I am de-motivated.

This comment resonates with Garson's (1999: 4) finding that "redeployment has done so much damage". Educators don't know whether they will still be employed the next day. This is psychologically damaging for them, and many feel used and resentful. They can't plan ahead because they are constantly thinking: "Oh well, by that time I'll be out of a job".

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However, there is a positive side to redeployment. One of the interviewees had no complaints about the redeployment process, and said:

Nothing has changed. At least, it's even better now that I belong somewhere. I still continue with what I was doing in my previous school: teaching.

### 3.4 Acceptance by new colleagues

It seems that most redeployed educators are accepted by their new colleagues. Hence the interviewee said:

I feel at home. I am very happy about this school. We are always together and work as a team. I think I am accepted in this school.

### 3.5 Satisfaction with the new school

The comment above indicates that the redeployed educator was satisfied with his/her new school. New colleagues accept him/her, and s/he has developed personal relationships and teamwork. This experience is supported by the following comment:

I feel at home. It is very convenient to me. The working environment is excellent. There is teamwork and no hidden agendas. There is good planning.

This comment would probably be different if the educator had been redeployed to a remote area where there were no classrooms or infrastructure. Another interviewee wrote:

I am inconvenienced. I left my family behind when I relocated. I commute long distances. I am uprooted from my community. I am a foreigner here.

### 3.6 Future redeployment

One of the respondents pointed out:

I feel I am at a disadvantage as a result of redeployment. With the principle of last-in-first-out it means in future I am likely to be redeployed again.

This statement captures the problems facing redeployed educators. Because redeployment is continuous process, they may be redeployed again. Collective agreements are silent on this aspect. They do not say

that a redeployed educator cannot be further redeployed. If such educators are again declared in excess, they may be more likely to be retrenched.

As indicated, victims of redeployment feel ignored, unappreciated and undervalued in most cases, hence redeployment processes should in future consider the human factor (Garson 1999: 4). One interviewee commented that in future the employer:

[...] must get the views of teachers in excess. They must value a particular teacher at school more than principles such as last-in-first-out. Proper channels must be followed as there are many problems. Teachers are treated differently, some receive letters from the head office while others don't. The procedure must change.

#### 4. Conclusions

The findings reveal that educators experienced redeployment differently. Some felt that they were victimised and were uncertain about their future. Hence they equated redeployment with retrenchment. This view resonates with Ambrose's (1996: 5-6) thesis which states that in the past, employees were called "organisation people", meaning that they would be loyal to their employer in exchange for job security — the notion of a permanent job. Carrim (2002) deals with this notion through the concept of educator identities, arguing that educators have chosen teaching for a variety of reasons, including job security. According to Carrim (2002: 314) job security includes the application of the labour laws which prevent discrimination and unfair treatment. Therefore, redeployment should be in line with labour law. However, employees cannot be guaranteed a job for life as in the past.

From the theoretical propositions outlined above I have indicated that redeployment procedures are provided for in Resolution 6 of 1998 of the ELRC. The procedure simply provides that redeployment is based on operational requirements (PAM, B 2.4(a)) as well as the basic principles of fairness and continued employment. The roles played by the inspector (district manager) and the school principal in the redeployment process are significant. The inspector must determine the needs of the establishment. This task is performed in consultation with the principal, who must report on needs. On receipt of this report the inspector declares an audit of schools within his/her district. Posts in a district are retained on the recommendation of the inspector.

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Most interviewees (60%) agreed that the inspectors had followed proper procedures. However, some (40%) disagreed. One was of the opinion that “everything was given to the school to decide”. Another claimed that no procedure was followed. Instead of decisions being made by the inspectorate, the entire process was decentralised, causing management problems. In certain cases personal issues crept into the decision-making and ultimately those educators who were not “favourites” were redeployed.

The interviewees revealed a wide range of attitudes and feelings emanating from redeployment. With regard to their attitudes towards their principals, they experienced a syndrome that can be described in words such as shock, anger, guilt, fear, distrust, de-motivation and stress. Ambrose (1996) concurs that any person transferred from his/her employment would experience such attitudes and feelings. What is noteworthy about the experiences of the redeployed educators is that they no longer trusted their principals and felt betrayed.

With regard to their attitudes and feelings towards former colleagues, the respondents pointed out that they also felt betrayed by those colleagues who, through the unions, were opposed to redeployment, but did not act after it was imposed. Similarly, they argued that they were also betrayed by their unions. They did not understand how the unions could agree to such a policy. These attitudes and feelings are symptomatic of a person who has suffered a loss. Ambrose (1996) argues that such people often apportion blame to others and to the system. In the same vein, Horwitz (1991: 28) argues that unions have become part of the system, and this makes them less potent in dealing with workers' rights. However, some of the interviewees stated that they were redeployed because of a decline in learner enrolment and considered redeployment inevitable, as it was implemented for social justice (Vally & Tleane 2001: 178-200). It seems that curriculum changes, changes in the grading of the school and financial restraints have no impact on the process (Beckmann *et al* 2000: 128-34). The procedures outlined above were implemented to overcome errors in decision-making associated with the human factor. Therefore, a decline in learner enrolment remains the major cause of the redeployment of educators. Given the responses above, it appears that the procedures for filling vacancies were probably not implemented. For instance, there are cases where a letter of re-

deployment was given by the school governing body, recommending that the educator be redeployed. This is probably unprocedural, which seems to confirm the fact that neither the inspectorate nor the principals followed correct procedures.

This project does not investigate what caused the decline in learner enrolment. However, some interviewees cited the opening of new schools nearby as the main reason.

Garson (1999: 4) points out that educators who are redeployed are negatively affected. They are not certain about their future, and this is psychologically stressful. They cannot plan their careers because they think that they may be retrenched at any given time. Similarly, Herman (1998: 52) equates redeployment with retrenchment because educators who are declared in excess are given packages to leave the system.

Schools have lost educators despite the principle of redeployment stipulated in the ELRC Resolution, that transfer of educators in posts declared in excess in the process of redeployment is compulsory, but that educators who hold posts in excess are not automatically redundant. The implication of this principle is that educators declared in excess must be absorbed. However, failure to apply for posts from the closed vacancy list (posts reserved for educators declared in excess) leads to resignation.

Most educators indicated that they felt accepted by their new colleagues. This seems to refute Mokgalane *et al's* (2003: 255) assertion that redeployed educators responded by blaming expatriate educators. These authors argue that educators want foreign educators to be replaced by locals and that the entry of any person who is not local causes problems, when educators in the receiving school do not accept the new educator.

The experiences of educators on this matter vary. Some educators feel at home in their new schools and that they have an excellent working environment without any hidden agenda. Such educators probably had problems with their former colleagues. In the new school they have no such "baggage" and are accepted by their colleagues. Hence they are able to join professional teams within the school.

However, other educators felt inconvenienced by redeployment. They left their families behind and had to commute to work everyday.

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They were uprooted from their own environment and could not relate well with the new environment. Redeployment seems to exacerbate the problem of the migrant labour system, where people travel great distances between home and their employment, exposing them to socio-economic dangers such as road accidents, unstable families, and illnesses (Dolny 2001: 167).

It seems that redeployed educators are exposed to perpetual movement between schools, especially if we consider the principle of last-in-first-out. Because they may be the last to enter the school as new employees, such educators are likely to be redeployed again. In addition, learner enrolment is not stable, but changes according to socio-economic and environmental factors. To keep learner enrolment stable would require schools to operate on business principles, which is a problem South African schools have not yet mastered (Pretorius 1999: 158 ).

The Department of Education should train its officials in the procedures of redeployment. The respondents lamented the fact that in some cases proper procedures were inconsistently applied, or not applied at all.



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