

Leadership Succession as an Aspect of Organisational Sustainability in Complementary Schools in England

ANTHONY THORPE

University of Roehampton

Email: A.Thorpe@roehampton.ac.uk

LINET ARTHUR

Oxford Brookes University

ANA SOUZA

Oxford Brookes University

ABSTRACT: The article explores leadership succession as an aspect of organisational sustainability in complementary schools in England as an example of how schools in precarious circumstances seek to ensure their survival and growth. The schools provide part-time education outside of mainstream, state-funded school systems in many countries. Often established by migrant and minority ethnic groups to teach language, culture, religion and/or to consolidate state school learning, a lack of resources can threaten their stability and development. Using concepts from organisational sustainability and leadership succession planning, we analyse data collected from seven Brazilian and Chinese complementary school leaders in England. Our focus on the little researched context of complementary schools adds to the understanding of leading and managing in distinctive and challenging circumstances. Their inclusion in the debates and research can foster different insights into the ways that schools in diverse and challenging contexts seek to ensure their survival and growth.

Introduction

The article explores leadership succession as an aspect of organisational sustainability in complementary schools in England as an example of how vulnerable schools in precarious circumstances seek to ensure their survival and growth. Using concepts from organisational sustainability and leadership succession planning, we analyse data collected from seven Brazilian and Chinese complementary school leaders in England.

Complementary schools (also known by other names such as supplementary, 'mother-tongue', heritage, or community language schools) exist in many countries outside of mainstream, state-funded school systems. They are often established by migrant and minority ethnic groups to teach language, culture, religion and/or to consolidate state school learning. The schools are largely operated on a part-time basis by community organisations often staffed by volunteers from the communities themselves. Research suggests the schools make an important, but overlooked, contribution to pupil learning and well-being. However, a lack of resources leads to concerns about their ability to sustain and develop education provision (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015; Francis, Archer & Mau, 2008; Nwulu, 2015).

The article begins with a brief introduction to the organisational sustainability and leadership succession literature before moving to a short depiction of the context and environment of complementary schools, with particular reference to England. The methodology of the study

reported is then outlined before analysing and discussing the data. Finally, a number of implications and directions for future research are suggested in the conclusion.

Considering leadership succession within the wider context of organisational sustainability opens up a more nuanced understanding of these schools as vulnerable and fragile organisations seeking to ensure their survival and growth in precarious circumstances. We argue for the inclusion of complementary schools in the debates and research about school sustainability and succession planning to foster a better understanding of the ways in which schools in diverse and challenging contexts can seek to ensure their survival and growth.

Leadership Succession as an Aspect of Organisational Sustainability

This section introduces ideas around organisational sustainability including the particular understandings adopted in our analysis and discussion of the outcomes of the study reported here. Leadership succession is then outlined as a particular example within a human resource management (HRM) approach to organisational sustainability in schools.

Organisational sustainability (sometimes referred to as business sustainability) is a concept that broadly refers to survival, continuation and stability, in other words, keeping the organisation going. There is an additional concern for thriving and growing in a viable way, not necessarily in size but also in the sense of flourishing, hence the use of biological metaphors rather than financial metrics alone (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). Established concepts of organisational sustainability involve a number of aspects or dimensions, for example, mission and organisational identity related to strategic planning; business planning for products, services and programmes; human resources and the organisational culture; and financial stability involving ethical sources of monies which would not later prove a threat to the organisation's continuation (Colbert & Kurucz, 2007). Recognising the fragility of organisations in order to address risk and unpredictability also helps to illuminate the shortcomings of efficiency and effectiveness models (Bendell, 2014).

Organisational sustainability can be distinguished from the idea of sustainable organisations or implementing 'green' sustainable development. From this perspective, Pepper and Wildy's (2009) focus on teachers with responsibility for leading educating for sustainability programmes in a number of secondary schools in Western Australian is something different from this article's focus on sustaining a school as an organisation, though there are links between these foci such as, for example, the careful use of resources (DfE, 2012).

Some have called for a new approach to organisational sustainability from a human resource management perspective which values sustainability for human and ecological resources through a new decision-making paradigm of *talentship, talent segmentation, and sustainability* that develops people who can move the new agenda forward and selects those for positions in a way that expresses those values (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). This human resource management aspect of organisational sustainability requires an approach to building leadership capacity that balances and integrates economic, social and environmental factors (Colbert & Kurucz, 2007).

Conway's (2015) definition of organisational sustainability involving capacity building so a school can continue pedagogical improvement and promote improved school outcomes even when there is a change of personnel is helpful in illustrating why a human resource management approach to organisational sustainability in schools might be fruitful. For example, the HRM organisational sustainability approach that seeks to address the loss of expertise and experience when leaders step down from their posts can be applied to

challenges raised by the shortage of principals and the loss of corporate knowledge during school restructuring (Marks, 2013).

The importance of the development of future leaders, the handing over of leadership responsibilities and the impact on the long-term sustainability of mainstream state and independent schools are widely recognised (Bush, 2011; Russell & Sabina, 2014), as are the specific challenges these pose for small, vulnerable schools (Halsey, 2011). As the demographics predict significant numbers of current senior school leaders retiring in the near future in Western-style state and independent systems (Bennett, Carpenter & Hill, 2011; Doneley, Jervis-Tracey & Sim, 2018), there is a call for strategic responses being made to avoid instability across educational organisations (Macpherson, 2010; Marks, 2013; Peters-Hawkins, Reed & Kingsberry, 2018).

The image of 'passing the baton' similar to a relay race is used by Bennett, Carpenter and Hill (2011) to signal ideas of continuity and progress in their consideration of principal succession in New Zealand state schools. These authors argue that capacity building involves not just planning through identifying and supporting possible individual successors, but also the creation of a culture that values leadership development and promotes shared leadership. Hence, the stance we take in this article that leadership succession is an aspect of organisational sustainability.

Research in the context of small schools may prove most relevant for identifying trends and challenges for leadership in complementary schools. In this connection, Halsey (2011) concludes his consideration of the problems associated with the preparation and support of leaders of small schools, by identifying the need for more networking opportunities, but also a greater demonstration by government and policy makers that they value the work of these schools and the people who work in them. Starr's (2015) exploration of the challenges that school principals face in rural Australia is also relevant insofar as she identifies how these schools are unconventional compared to those located in more urban settings where more specialist resources are near at hand.

Russell and Sabina's (2014) conceptual framework for principal succession is developed from examining actions taken by six school districts in the USA. They conclude that having a clear intention and plan to develop future leaders results in greater effectiveness and higher quality candidates. The 'grow your own' solution to managing leadership succession by building and sustaining an organisation's leadership capacity comes with the recognition that developing a pool of possible leaders depends on 'the reservoir of leadership capacity in an organisation and, perhaps, most importantly, the willingness of potential leaders to come forward' (Fink, 2010, p. 124). Such willingness may well be developed and sustained through the mentoring of potential leaders, but different school contexts, it is argued, must be taken into account when deciding how to promote leadership succession planning (Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012).

Myung, Loeb and Horng (2011) analysed the identification of talent for future school leadership in the absence of formal succession planning or programmes in the USA through the use of tapping. Drawing on the metaphor of tapping an oil pipeline, they refer to principals and others 'tapping' potential leaders often using informal encounters to encourage and motivate them to consider leadership positions. These researchers found that nearly three quarters of principals and over half the assistant principals in their study had been 'tapped' suggesting that it was a successful motivator. There was some concern expressed, however, that those being tapped were not necessarily the ones with the requisite skills and that people tended to tap those most like themselves rather than promoting equality and diversity. Bryant, Escalanate and Selva's (2017) study develops this

idea further by looking at how school leaders build leadership capacity in tapped teachers through three areas of importance, namely those of school culture, enabling authenticity in leadership duties, and mentoring and modelling school leadership practices.

Attention is now turned to a brief outline of the context and environment of complementary schools in England. This short overview ends with a summary of issues gleaned from the organisational sustainability and leadership succession literature that are then used to inform the analysis and discussion of data elicited from head teachers of complementary schools who participated in the study reported.

The Context and Environment of Complementary Schools in England

Complementary schools exist in many countries outside of the mainstream, state-funded school system. They are also referred to in research and policy documents by other names, such as, heritage or community language schools (Kagan, Carreira & Hitchins Chik, 2017; Trifonas & Aravossitas, 2018), supplementary schools (Maylor et al., 2010), and 'mother-tongue' schools (Walters, 2011) though the schools themselves might not use any of these titles. The range of names reflects the different interests of researchers and policy makers, as well as the self-perceptions of those in the schools themselves about the nature and purpose of what they do.

In the UK, where education is a devolved matter for each of the constituent countries, documents, local and national governments tend to refer to supplementary schools with the idea of the provision supplementing mainstream schooling (Maylor et al., 2010; Nwulu, 2015). We have referred to complementary schools in this article, as a range of authors have also done, to indicate the positive complementary function to mainstream education that many working and attending the schools see them as having (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015; Francis, Archer & Mau, 2008; Sneddon, 2017).

These schools are often established by migrant and minority ethnic groups within a country to teach language, culture, or religion, but they may also see the consolidation of state school learning as a secondary, or sometimes, primary goal (Maylor et al., 2010). The schools are largely operated on a part-time basis at weekends or during the evenings, but rarely have their own dedicated premises. They are often run by volunteers, who may or may not receive remuneration for their work and expenses (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015; Li Wei, 2006).

There are between 3,000 and 5,000 complementary schools run by various groups and individuals in the UK (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015). Such a wide estimate suggests the difficulty of identifying and collecting data on organisations that are often operating on the peripheries of the vision of policy makers, practitioners and researchers focused on mainstream schooling. Some organisations may comprise a single group meeting once a week in a room in a community centre or hall, whilst others involve hundreds of young people in multiple classes at different age levels taking place outside of the main teaching hours on the premises of a state or private school or college (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015).

Much of the research conducted in these contexts has focused on language acquisition and teaching often as an aspect of the wider topic of heritage and community language teaching and provision (Hall et al., 2002; Souza & Gomes, 2017; Starks & Nicholas, 2017), as well as on the relationship to the identity of individuals, families and communities (Di Salvo, 2018; Little, 2017; Seals, 2017). Another strand of research has explored the importance of the schools' contribution to pupil learning and well-being, often commenting that this contribution

has been overlooked and highlighting the need to support their continuation and development as organisations (Maylor et al., 2010; Nwulu, 2015, Strand, 2007).

Little research has been conducted into leading, leaders or leadership development in complementary schools, but the body of work around the professional development of community and heritage language teachers in the UK and the USA may provide some pointers, especially as many head teachers have previously been teachers, often in the schools they now lead (Anderson, 2008; Aravossitas & Oikonomakou, 2018). Some of this work is concerned, more broadly, with the professional development of community language teachers and preparation programmes for a range of school settings (Anderson, 2008; Cho, 2014), whilst Dorneles and Souza (2016) reflect on the professional development of Brazilian Portuguese complementary school teachers in London. All three studies identify, in addition to developing pedagogical skills, that sharing professional narratives and networking are vital elements to foster teacher and school identity and purpose (Anderson, 2008; Cho, 2014; Dorneles & Souza, 2016).

However, the wider organisational and administrative aspects related to leading and managing schools tend to be addressed somewhat obliquely arising from pedagogical and resourcing issues rather than directly as we do in this article. Certainly, complementary school leaders have been interviewed or involved in completing questionnaires, but the focus of such research has usually been on matters of teaching and support for teachers or parents (Maylor et al., 2010; Walters, 2011).

A number of logistical and funding challenges facing complementary school leaders have included a lack of financial and human resources leading to concerns about their ability to sustain and develop the education and wider services they provide (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015; Nwulu, 2015). For example, all schools involved in the project conducted by Francis, Archer and Mau (2008) were perceived to be under-funded and under-resourced with staff members and pupils complaining about the impact this made on the quality of service provided. Head teachers spoke of a lack of funding for teacher salaries affecting recruitment in terms both of supply, and the level of teaching experience and qualifications among recruits. Facilities were often limited in terms of buildings, access to equipment within the buildings and consumables (Francis, Archer & Mau, 2008) making long-term planning difficult. This precarious grasp on logistics and insecure financial arrangements identify many schools as particularly fragile organisations according to Bendell's (2016) criteria.

In one of the few works to consider organisational sustainability explicitly in relation to complementary schools, Sneddon (2017) explores sustainable approaches to complementary education in England in relation to the design and implementation of heritage language education programmes in a range of settings in various countries. She outlines how the social, educational and political influences around immigration, ethnic minorities, bilingualism and multilingualism in England have created a 'volatile' policy context and environment for the schools. The question is therefore raised as to how communities develop 'sustainable structures for the language and cultural education of their children' (Sneddon, 2017, p. 85), which prompts the concerns of heritage language researchers who have moved beyond pedagogy to asking questions about how, for example, immigrants and speakers of community languages are valued in wider society (Seals & Kreeft Payton, 2017). Sneddon (2017) links sustainability and institutionalism, the latter concept having been developed and applied in education settings by Miles, Ekholm and Vandenberghe (1987) who investigated 'how innovative educational projects become adopted and embedded into the regular practice of educational institutions, ensuring their stability' (Sneddon, 2017, p. 88).

By examining two contrasting models of complementary education based in the east of London, Sneddon (2017) identifies the need for any innovative programme to 'become institutionalised in the sense of becoming embedded, sustainable, and replicable within the mainstream local environment' (p. 88). One model is that of the Shpresa programme (a charity run by, and for, the Albanian speaking community) and the other model comes from the Tower Hamlets Community Language Service supported by a local government authority. Whilst Sneddon's focus is on the organisational sustainability for programmes and services, rather than on schools, she does consider leadership succession in the case of Shpresa. In this connection, she notes that when the founders leave, there 'remains an area of risk with respect to sustainability' despite their attempts to mitigate this occurrence by means of delegating leadership and management roles, establishing procedures, developing administrative systems, and seeking to develop the leadership skills of others to ensure continuity of the programme (Sneddon, 2017, p. 94).

The two models of sustainable practice that Sneddon (2017) examines are comparatively large, multi-site programmes compared to many complementary schools that are single site and, perhaps, comprise no more than one or two classes of children. However, her focus was on programmes as a whole rather than individual schools and she makes the point that different vulnerabilities will emerge in different contexts so that no model will neatly fit all.

In summary, there are a number of the issues arising from the organisational sustainability and leadership succession literature that are pertinent to the analysis and discussion of data from head teachers of complementary schools that follows. They are, firstly, that leadership succession is something that concerns all schools to some extent, but it takes on a particular form for small and fragile schools which, even in the short term, face problems that threaten their very existence (Francis, Archer & Mau, 2008). Secondly, organisational sustainability encompasses a concern for human resource management including leadership succession (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). Thirdly, leadership succession needs expressions of explicit intent in developing leadership capacity (Conway, 2015; Russell & Sabina, 2014) and requires a willingness of people to engage in the roles and practices (Fink, 2010; Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012). However, whilst approaching individuals to motivate them to apply for posts is important (Myung, Loeb & Horng, 2011), attention to wider school culture, including leadership development and leadership practices, is also crucial (Bennett, Carpenter & Hill, 2011; Bryant, Escalante & Selva, 2017).

Brazilian and Chinese Complementary School Leaders and Leadership Succession

In light of the above, we now draw on interview data generated from seven complementary school leaders in England (three from Brazilian schools and four from Chinese schools) across the two separate projects that we have conducted. Both projects sought to understand more about the context and practices of complementary school leaders in general from which concerns about organisational sustainability emerged, including those associated with leadership succession.¹

¹ The two projects were both focused on leading and managing in complementary schools with initial findings presented in conference papers. The Brazilian complementary school leaders project (Arthur & Souza, 2017) was funded by BELMAS (The British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society) and had two phases. The first phase involved the collection of data through a survey of 13 schools (one of which operated on two sites and made returns for each site) to develop school profiles, and the second used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to elicit experiences and views of leadership from practitioners in three of the schools. The Chinese

The content analysis of the data drew on ideas and concepts from organisational sustainability and leadership succession planning. In keeping with our exploratory qualitative methodology and small sample size, the participant quotes that have been selected serve to illustrate a point in a particular context rather than to prove it and to claim generalisability for all contexts and times.

Appointment and motivation

Head teachers in our small interview sample appeared to come from a range of professions such as bankers, engineers, lawyers, nurses, as well as those working as teachers or teaching assistants in state or public schools. Yet, in some cases, the interviewee was employed in a non-professional setting as their professional qualification was achieved in another country but not recognised in England. Our participants often came in contact first with the school as a parent keen for their children to learn Portuguese or Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), and then later they became more involved with the life of the school through teaching or other administrative roles.

These experiences as a parent led to a motivation for taking on a leadership role that was less about the individual feeling prepared for the role and was more about a wish to give back what they saw themselves as having received. One school leader of a Brazilian school described how she came to be in that position:

When I was looking for a place when [my daughter] was 5 years old and I was looking for somewhere she could have Portuguese language lessons. So, I went to this little group. I thought it was really tiny: it had 5, 6 kids. And I loved it, it was great and all that, but as a mother. And then, the person who was running this group, someone in her family passed away and she didn't want to be responsible for it anymore. A year later or so, she said, 'Look, I don't want to continue it'. So, in order not to close it down, I said: 'Ok, I will then take over'. But I had no idea of what I was doing.

On the one hand, this story illustrates the fragility of some schools as the leaving of the head following a family bereavement precipitates an existential crisis for the organisation. On the other hand, it indicates that the willingness by the interviewee to take over the head teacher role was grounded in a wish to keep the school going because of what she and her family had received from it, rather than from a feeling of being prepared for the specifics of the role. This idea of 'paying back' as being the grounds for a willingness to take on the role (Fink, 2010; Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012) may be less obvious in mainstream state or independent school settings but needs to be taken into account when looking for new senior leaders and developing capacity in complementary schools. The interviewee's unexpected discovery that she 'loved' undertaking the role despite all its difficulties may be because, in part, it was attributable to the experience of dealing with the challenges of a small school linked closely to the community (Starr, 2015).

In contrast to state schools, a sizeable number of the respondents to the questionnaire conducted as part of the wider Brazilian complementary school leadership project (Arthur & Souza, 2017) had founded their own school and become its *de facto* leader (6 of the 14) indicating a different dynamic for understanding leadership succession compared with long established organisations. Of the other head teachers who responded to the questionnaire,

complementary school leaders' project involved semi-structured interviews with five head teachers (Thorpe, 2011).

three had been promoted after working as teachers at the school and three had been appointed after making enquiries because of their professional background, however, none had responded to an advertisement. One had been invited by a teacher or a parent of a child at the school to apply for the position.

Another example of leadership succession in a Chinese complementary school illustrates how the succession appeared to the interviewee as if it were a *fait accompli* arising from what seemed to be a crisis:

The headteacher called a meeting saying the school was to close as he was leaving, and no one wanted to be the headteacher - all the teachers were going back after completing their studies. I felt it was a bit of a shame. I spoke to my friend and said you should take over as I wasn't interested in administration but just happy to teach. Other parents (professional people) said 'why don't we chip in to help out?'

Although there has been a move away from postgraduate students from China and South-east Asia teaching and being head teachers, which has led to greater parental involvement, this comment also illustrates that 'tapping' may come from above (such as from the trustees or existing head teacher), and also from the side as colleagues identify and support potential leaders (Myung, Loeb & Horng, 2011).

An example illustrating a form of tapping can be seen in the story conveyed by an interviewee from a Chinese complementary school, who looks back at a two-stage process of being tapped:

The head teacher asked me to teach at the school. I said yes because I have been using the school for years [for my children] and now it's payback time. After one year [of me being a teacher], the head teacher departed suddenly. The governors asked me to be the head teacher and naturally, I said 'No'. It's a lot of responsibility but another candidate rejected the offer too and they came back to me and asked again. I said, 'I'll have a go'.

In the example above, the motivation of giving something back that has been received appears again. Here, the tapping process involves more than one person, in this case the head teacher and members of the governing committee, but there might not be overt co-ordination in this process. There might also be some to-ing and fro-ing in the tapping process as the person often does not consider him or herself to be someone who can take on a leadership role in the school (Macpherson, 2010).

These anecdotes of tapping and willing volunteers raise the concern that only certain people will be approached or encouraged to put themselves forward (Myung, Loeb & Horng, 2011). However, the precariousness of the situations around succession portrayed above may suggest that those taking up roles come from a wider range of backgrounds than those appointed through a more formal system of selection and appointment.

Leadership development

Much of the literature considers the importance of leadership development in sustaining schools as organisations (Fink, 2010), but the forms of development which complementary school leaders find helpful may not be those expected in mainstream schools. For example, a Chinese interviewee explained why, after appointment as the head teacher, he also undertook a postgraduate certificate (PGCE) in teaching at a nearby university: 'I knew it was a tough job. I did a PGCE afterwards because I wanted to do the job properly'.

A Brazilian complementary head teacher had a very similar concern about her lack of experience in mainstream schools and formal qualifications compared with her confidence in administrative and leadership tasks. She felt unable to guide teachers on how to improve, saying she found the curriculum issues to be the 'biggest challenge': 'I don't know what makes a good lesson ... I have my own personal view but I never know if it is the right one'.

In both examples, the interviewees see pedagogical development as being crucial to their leadership learning enabling them to sustain and develop the school as an organisation. Such an importance placed on pedagogy may be in contrast with many school leaders in the state sector who have most likely been teachers and consider themselves to be proficient and knowledgeable, but seek specific, and often generic, leadership development. The importance of networking and collaboration for small school leaders (Halsey, 2011) may have much relevance, although the networks and the people they wish to connect with might not be the ones expected, as was the case for the Chinese school head teacher who undertook a PGCE to help him with his leadership role.

Succession planning through creating a vision of longevity

Some interviewees had concerns about succession and linked these to their worries about the longevity of the school and plans for passing on the baton (Bennett, Carpenter & Hill, 2011). One Brazilian school leader explained how she was already making plans for succession because her daughter was growing up:

I want to hand the school over in the future ... I want to stay for a year or two and then, hand it over ... I'd like to start to get them ready to continue. I'm very open about it. It is an open conversation.

Another head teacher put it as follows:

And I've spoken to them [the staff] about it – 'Look, I believe that I'm not going to keep this work in the future. There will be a time that I'll stop and I'd like to train someone for that'. Because I don't want it to end ... I want to hand the school over in the future.

Here, the head teachers appear to be using a strategy of trying to include the other staff members in the vision of the school as an organisation with longevity needing longer-term planning to encourage people to come forward in the knowledge that they will be supported (Russell & Sabina, 2014). This planning may not necessarily be written down in documents but could still be efficacious.

At another Brazilian school, the head teacher saw involving the parents as a means to ensure the continuation of the school linking to earlier ideas of tapping and capacity building:

Then the other mothers, for fear it would close down, got more involved with the project and the project is now a lot different from what it was then because the structure is different.

All the interviewees expressed an interest in developing the school's staff as a strategy to keep the school going, but they saw themselves as constrained from sending them on external courses because of a lack of finance. Some opportunities for staff members to gain experience and promotion within the school, however, emerged from a crisis when a teacher left. For example, according to one head teacher:

That's what happened to two classes recently: the TAs [teaching assistants] took over even though they didn't have the qualifications of teachers. But they wanted to become teachers.

Some participants spoke of wanting to train, mentor and develop colleagues to enable a successor to take over running the school in due course by developing everyone's leadership capacity. This was illustrated in the shared leadership style espoused by a Chinese school head teacher who said, 'My deputy head has been here for many years, she taught me all the tricks. She is the real head teacher and I'm just the front man [laughs]'. Whilst, the head teacher of a small Brazilian school spoke of it being 'a very communitarian project ... I think we are working like we are kind of in the same family'. These comments resonate with the ideas around shared leadership practices and the acknowledgement of the contribution of others to the practice of leading and managing (Bryant, Escalante & Selva, 2017).

Conclusion

Through our exploration, we hope to have added to the understanding of the practice of leading and managing in distinctive and challenging circumstances with a focus on this, hitherto, little researched context of complementary schools. In doing so, we have also sought to foster sharper insights into the ways in which schools in diverse and challenging contexts can seek to ensure their survival and growth. We give some examples of this understanding below before suggesting some directions for further research.

By exploring leadership succession within the wider context of organisational sustainability literature and theory, we have offered a more nuanced understanding of fragile organisations. Instead of a simple focus on individuals, such as current senior leaders and potential successors, an awareness of the contextual issues of the specific school and the macro-influences emanating from policy and discourses around immigrant and ethnic minorities can be appreciated (Sneddon, 2017; Seals & Kreeft Peyton, 2017).

Our sample of seven head teachers was a small one and we have made no claims to a universal applicability. Rather, a number of qualitative points have been illustrated that uncover the special nature of the way context interacts with leadership and consequently leadership succession and organisational sustainability in complementary schools. We have sought to reveal the voices of practitioners, which are rarely heard, illuminating the situation of leaders in complementary schools where the short to medium term stability of the organisation cannot be assumed, as might be the case with state funded and established independent schools. The people working in the complementary schools have agency as well as benefiting and suffering from wider social, economic and environmental structures.

The concerns that researchers and practitioners have raised about a lack of candidates for head teacher posts may be the symptom of something else within the organisation rather than comprising the whole situation. Therefore, the insights of organisational sustainability may help to understand the wider organisational context and suggest that tackling the underlying structures in school culture and leadership practice may well be a better way to mitigate financial worries and leadership shortages (Bennett, Carpenter & Hill, 2011).

School leaders can develop a vision about the continuance of the school through leadership succession to explicitly demonstrate intent (Russell & Sabina, 2014). These visions do not necessarily have to be written down in documents and may be effectively shared through discussion in formal and informal meetings and in everyday conversations. However, the leaders may not necessarily realise the ways they are undertaking this planning and

signalling intent, thus reducing the likelihood of having the desired outcome of ensuring leadership succession and sustaining the organisation.

Recognising that there may be different vulnerabilities in different contexts is important to counter assumptions and attempts to offer monolithic solutions to organisational instability (Sneddon, 2017; Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012). Large-scale solutions to challenges associated with leadership succession and organisational sustainability developed in, or for, well-funded state contexts may well not be applicable to smaller schools such as complementary schools, which fall outside of standard models, insofar as they receive little, if any, monies from the public purse. Our analysis suggests that in complementary schools there may be different mechanisms operating and emerging within the specific school context. For example, the special circumstances of organisations that are new and have only ever been led by the founder need to be considered in the case of leadership succession in complementary schools. So too, the motivations and grounds for feeling prepared to take on leadership roles may be different. It seems an important point for wider research and policy work on school sustainability, including leadership succession, to at least hedge comments and recommendations with reference to specific contexts in which they are more likely to be applicable.

Leadership succession needs to be researched further in diverse contexts but also more research would be desirable into the practice of leadership succession planning going beyond the proffering of prescriptive models (Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012). We spoke only to senior leaders in post and in schools that were still operating, so it would be interesting to elicit the perspectives of those involved with schools that have now closed down and where there had been no leadership succession.

The other elements of organisational sustainability should not be ignored, such as mission and organisational identity related to strategic planning; business planning for educational provision, services and programmes; and financial stability. In commercial business contexts, new ideas of organisational sustainability have sought to identify the limits of short-term profit values and have argued that a moral purpose and social vision are needed by business leaders (Colbert & Kurucz, 2007). However, the general assumption that the education of children and young people is a moral and socially enhancing endeavour means that schools, especially in the non-profit sector, might helpfully focus on the aspects of organisational sustainability that they lack, such as strategic planning. It would be unhelpful for research to look only at ecologically, 'green' issues for schools whilst not addressing the other factors to be balanced in sustaining an organisation.

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