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Supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations: a heuristic device for school leaders and researchers

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Supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations in the UK: a heuristic device for school leaders and researchers

Abstract

Many supplementary and complementary schools operating in the UK and other countries have connections and relationships with religious organisations. However, there is considerable variety and complexity in these links and connections. Amidst some public concerns about these schools and as so little is known about them compared with other school sectors, a new heuristic device is offered to support leadership practice in supplementary and mainstream schools, and to encourage research particularly in the areas of governance, leadership and management. The need for this heuristic is made all the more urgent because of the disengagement of the state, at various levels, from appreciation of and support for the work of these schools, compounded by the lack of knowledge and understanding of their governance, leadership and management in particular. The exclusion of supplementary schools with religious links from future research and school partnerships needs to be avoided.

Key words: complementary schools, supplementary schools, leadership, governance, heuristic device, religious organisations

Introduction

Supplementary schools (also referred to as complementary schools and other termsⁱ) operate as out of mainstream school hours provision, in the UK and other countries, are connected to formal religious organisations. There is, however, considerable variety and complexity in these connections or relationships with formal religious institutions. There is also a problem with the disengagement of the state, at various levels, from appreciation of and support for the work of these schools, compounded by the lack of knowledge and understanding of these schools, and in particular, their governance, leadership and management.

Other articles in this special issue have addressed what these schools are and some of the leadership challenges. The aim of this article is to offer a new heuristic device to support leadership practice in these schools and mainstream schools, and to encourage research particularly in the areas of governance, leadership and management. The examples used in this article are drawn largely from the UK but these schools in many other countries (Kagan et al., 2017).

This topic requires greater attention and more research because, so little is known about them and their contribution to education of children compared with other sectors of schools and education, in particular, regarding their governance, leadership and management (Thorpe et al., 2018). This lack of knowledge may also contribute to public discourses that view supplementary schools with religious links as problems to be addressed, rather than appreciating and supporting their contributions. Concerns are also expressed that these fears and lack of understanding are, in part, contributing to a disengagement from supplementary schools at all levels of government and by mainstream schools (Cherti and Bradley, 2011). Hence, the need for a heuristic device to inform school leadership practice and research as the exclusion of supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations from future research (Myers

and Grosvenor, 2011) and partnerships with mainstream schools needs to be avoided (Ramalingam and Griffith, 2015).

Following this introduction, some background is given on supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations before explaining what organisational heuristic devices are and how they are used. The heuristic to support leadership practice and encourage research, which is the focus of this article, is then outlined to identify the knowledge captured giving school leaders and researchers the cues to search for in the context of their practice related to supplementary schools with religious connections. The following section expands upon how the heuristic can be used in by supplementary school leaders, leaders of mainstream schools and researchers. The concluding section summarises what a heuristic device can, and cannot, be expected to do and ends by identifying possible questions for further research related to the governance, leadership and management of these schools.

Supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations

Supplementary schools have been defined as, 'community-led, out-of-school education programmes that offer one, or a combination, of core curriculum support, language tuition and cultural activities and classes' (Ramalingam and Griffith, 2015: 8). They operate on a part time basis with activities taking place at the weekend or else in the evening, though this will depend on arrangements in each organisation. Their programmes are characterised as supplementing what is offered to children and young people in mainstream schools by providing something that is additional and complementary (Maylor et al., 2010).

There is an expanding body of research on the history and background of supplementary schools though it remains a marginal concern (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011). A common theme of existing research is that of the precarious circumstances of many of these schools that are

not funded by central government and rarely by local government. The schools often struggle with finding suitable accommodation, recruiting appropriate staff members (volunteers or otherwise), and obtaining adequate resources, whilst securing incomes from parents paying a small attendance fee for their children, charities and other grants and holding fundraising events (Sneddon, 2017; Thorpe et al., 2018; Walters, 2011). Central government does not fund any out of school hours religious classes. The small number of local authorities who fund supplementary schools generally have restrictions on funding religious classes, as do many charitable trusts and other sources of funding, such as the John Lyon's Charity (2020) that will fund neither the promotion of religion nor politics.

The connections that some supplementary schools have with religious organisations are varied and complex but there is no claim in this section to a definitive overview of these school and pupil numbers and their characteristics as no such single data base exists as it does for full time, mainstream schools in the UK (DfE, 2020), hence the need for heuristic device to promote further research and collaboration with mainstream schools. Whilst, Cherti and Bradley (2011: 68) report that 'Madrassas tend to be well-established institutions, often connected to a mosque and often registered as a charity' with committees of trustees being responsible for what happens in the school especially related to its governance and administration, not all supplementary schools with connections to a religious organisation are connected or organised in same way.

Religious, faith and cultural identifies are often intertwined in and around ethnicity and language (Gregory, 2013; Myers and Grosvenor, 2011). Parents and families often get to know one another through places of worship (Dove, 2013; Jiwani, 2015). For many supplementary schools, a wish for holistic child development is a focus on culture and religion even if the explicit focus is on language acquisition or complementing mainstream schoolwork but that a

school has a connection to a religious organisation does not mean that purpose is to proselytise in order to persuade someone to change their religious beliefs (MHCLG, 2010; Szczepek Reed et al., 2019).

Staff members may perceive little, if any, formal connection to a religious organisation; for example, in one Arabic language school, students learning Arabic said that it helped them to read the Qur'an, though the teachers did not explicitly make the link when speaking with researchers (Szczepek Reed et al., 2019). Supplementary schools set up to support Black African or Caribbean children often have, or had, an association with a church, but these schools are not always formally connected to Sunday School classes and the link could primarily be the use of the church's premises (Andrews, 2016; Dove, 1993, Gerrard, 2013).

The criticisms of schools with religious links often revolve around indoctrination and emotional autonomy in a liberal democracy (Marples, 2005) or specifically about illegal and/or unregistered schools in England (Snowdon, 2019). However, these concerns relate to full-time schools rather than with part time, voluntary schools where the fears appear to be those of the potential to replicate forms of radicalisation and child abuse that have taken place in mainstream public and private schools (Cherti and Bradley, 2011). A recent report on supplementary education identifying the potential to support pupils from all backgrounds to flourish specifically excludes schools they identify as providing 'any religious education' (Ramalingam and Griffith, 2015: 8).

Yet, according to the research projects that have been conducted, there seems little truth in the stereotype of supplementary schools being poorly organised and dangerous places (Gregory et al., 2013; Maylor et al., 2010). The authors of a study of language and values in three Arabic complementary schools in different cities in England concluded that the 'charges of radicalisation are entirely unfounded with regard to our sample of schools, and that instead the

schools show a strong commitment to a consensual, democratic approach to diversity' (Szczepek Reed et al., 2019: 62).

The small amount of research that has taken place into supplementary schools is mostly about teaching and learning (often language acquisition) and the impacts of these schools on achievement and well-being (Thorpe et al., 2018). When headteachers are interviewed the focus is not on matters of governance, leadership and management so little is known about them. As part time schools outside of the mainstream, these organisations are expected to follow safeguarding code of practice for out-of-school settings and meet other regulations for health and safety and financial procedures (DfE, 2018). Requirement for formal teaching qualifications, such as they exist in state funded schools, do not apply to out-of-school settings, though some staff members may hold these and be working in mainstream state or private schools (Issa and Williams, 2009). The National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE, 2020)ⁱⁱ is an independent charity that advises on governance and quality as well as providing training for teachers, trustees and managers and sample policies.

Hence the need for this heuristic to support leadership practice in these schools and mainstream schools, including cross sector collaborations and partnerships, and to encourage research into the supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations in particular, their governance, leadership and management. Such a device is neither a normative typology nor a methodological approach. A heuristic device does not seek to establish or prove a comprehensive, normative description but its usefulness in how it supports decision making in the field (Loock and Hinnen, 2015).

Organisational heuristics

Organisational heuristic device are used in practice to support decision making especially where matters are uncertain in that they 'capture knowledge about which cues to search for in the context of a particular decision, when to stop searching for cues, and what decision to derive from the cues obtained' (Loock and Hinnen, 2015: 2028). In this 'fast and frugal' understanding of the use of organisational heuristics, a good device is judged not by its accuracy or exactness in a normative sense but by its potential usefulness in the field to overcome situations where reasonable accurateness where action is required but information is limited (Bingham and Eisenhardt, 2011).

Organisational heuristics are not to be confused with heuristic inquiry as a methodological approach (Given, 2008). Furthermore, an organisational heuristic is not the same as an organisational typology that attempts to define typologies of organisations and their structures fuelled by a wish for precise classifications and descriptive definitions leading to some controversy about the appropriateness of using heuristics (Jurkovich, 1974; Mills and Margulies, 1980). Supplementary schools can be referred to as a type of school, but only to distinguish them from mainstream or private full-time schools, and there is no attempt here to claim a normative typology of schools as heuristics are meant to be incomplete and inherently inaccurate devices for discovery that can be constantly revised. They aim to bring attention to structuring decision making (Bingham et al., 2019) and involve a compromise that whilst they may lead to better predications, they involve greater bias (Ehrig and Schmidt, 2019).

This heuristic device is offered to support leadership practice in supplementary and mainstream schools, including cross sector collaborations and partnerships, and to encourage research into the supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations, in particular, their governance, leadership and management. It is needed precisely because of the lack of information available to school leaders and researchers about the complexities of the situation,

whilst action is required to avoid the exclusion of supplementary schools with religious links from school collaborations and future research projects.

A heuristic for supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations

This section outlines a heuristic device to support leadership practice in supplementary schools and mainstream schools, including cross sector collaborations and partnerships, and to encourage research into the supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations in particular, their governance, leadership and management. The heuristic is:

- Informal organisation
- Single leader organisation
- Formal independent organisation
- Umbrella organisation

The heuristic device's four elements are now explored to identify the knowledge captured giving school leaders and researchers the cues to search for in the context of their practice related to supplementary schools with religious connections (see appendix for a summary). It is not a typology with normative or descriptive claims. The contents of a heuristic are not fully justified through extant research as one might expect in the case of a typology (as explained in the section above). The order is not intended to indicate a desired and/or inevitable evolutionary progression but acknowledges that supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations are diverse and complex so placing them on a continuum where adjacent elements may not be perceptively different from each other as groups run from the fairly informally through to formal bodies with trustees and, so too, the connections with the religious organisation can range from being highly formalised to those which are loose and implicit.

Informal organisation

The informal organisation illustrates the flow between ethnicity, language and religion which can be missed within the general label of culture. Some supplementary schools start with a group of parents who are relatives, friends or attending the same place of worship. For example, the Kerala Community Supplementary School in Ipswich grew from a group of parents attending the same Catholic Church who went on to use the church's premises for the school (Jiwani, 2015), and there are similar patterns with some Black supplementary schools (Andrews, 2016; Dove, 1993; Gerard, 2013).

The group, which may include people with past or current teaching experience in mainstream schools or educational organisations, might run weekly classes for their own children in their own homes, sharing the teaching, supervision, and provision of materials and refreshments. As these groups grow, usually by word of mouth, parents may pool funds (rather than charge a set fee) to hire premises for a few hours a week and make small expenses payments to tutors.

A single person, or a group of volunteers operating collaboratively and providing mutual support, may undertake all the tasks associated with governance, leadership and management, perhaps. The discourse of quality, accountability and inspection so prevalent in mainstream schools (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2011), may either be consciously rejected or simply hold no relevance for the schools and its members.

Single leader organisation

Some supplementary schools begin as the initiative of one energetic and often charismatic individual such as someone holding a formal role in a religious organisation. However, this does not mean that the students or pupils must attend a specific place of worship. The motivation for establishing the school might be much broader than that of the teaching of

religion through classes and there may be no such lessons in the school's formal curriculum through a deliberate choice or perhaps, a stipulation of the funding body is that the money granted should not be used for such purposes (for example, John Lyon's Charity, 2020).

Responsibility for governance, leadership and management may well be perceived to lie with the school leader alone who could be very knowledgeable about safeguarding and other legal requirements from their role in the religious organisation. There may be a governing document. The school may have other quality audits offered through voluntary quality schemes such as that offered by the NRCSE (2020) or as part of a charitable grant (John Lyon's Charity, 2020). The sustainability of these schools varies considerably as when the founder moves on then the organisation may not survive, yet in other cases the baton of leadership is passed to another person or a small team with greater responsibility is formed allowing the school to continue (Thorpe et al., 2018).

Formal, independent organisation

The school may be set up as a charitable incorporated organisation; charitable company (limited by guarantee); unincorporated association; or a trust. For example, the three Arabic supplementary schools in Szczepk Reed et al's. (2019) study distinguished themselves from Madrassas or Qur'anic schools linked to a mosque. They will have a management committee of trustees or directors, and their governing document should state whether, or not, they are membership organisations, with trustees who are elected by and accountable to the membership. They may range in size again from as small as 20 or so students similar to the Bengali school that Walters (2011) writes about that was distinct from the local mosque school and, of course, mainstream schools.

Smaller schools may often have very active trustees, attending regularly to help supervise and run the school. In larger organisations, there will be designated school leaders who accountable to the Board for management and quality. Schools of any size who are concerned with quality may seek support from an organisation such as the NRCSE and especially if a recipient of a charitable grants.

The connections to religious organisations are varied. For example, the Kerala Community Supplementary School set up in Ipswich was sited in a mainstream Catholic state school because of its connection to the church attended by the founding members of the school (Jiwani, 2015). People with official roles in the religious institution may teach some sessions in the school, as in the case of the Polish Language school whose programme included faith lessons led by three catechists, two priests and one lay theologian who deliver the faith lessons (Souza et al., 2012). This latter case might be an example of where classes specifically identified as religious are taught by a separate group of people and are distinguished from other classes and opportunities offered by the school though this is often not a focus of those researching schools so is never made explicit.

Umbrella organisation

Other supplementary schools start up in association with an existing charitable trust that already administers a place of worship, offers full time education or provides advice or mentoring services amongst other charitable activities. This umbrella organisation often has experience of fundraising and has in place a full range of policies and procedures, especially around safeguarding. It may provide training and have existing administrative staff to take care of finance and payroll. Christian Sunday schools or many Madrassas would be examples of organizations linked to a place of worship as a sub-unit or project being under the same governance arrangements as the rest of the organisation and with a sub-budget (Cherti and

Bradley, 2011). Annual financial reports may not show income and expenditure on classes separately, although achievements and plans will form part of the narrative report.

Examples of this organisational arrangement would be, the Brazilian Catholic parish lessons for around 40 students led by catechists monitored by the parish priest and the Brazilian Pentecostal Church faith lessons run by 12 volunteers with 20 students, included in research by Souza et al. (2012), as might the large Reform Jewish Sunday school in which Walters (2019) explores the experiences and perceptions of learners about learning to read Hebrew.

There will be a formal governing document and an elected or appointed group of Trustees or Directors may monitor the classes as one of several projects their organisation undertakes. In larger organisations where the supplementary school is one of several projects, the Trustees may be more distant from school activities delegating leadership and management to those within the school.

A different example of an umbrella organisation would be the Westway Trust (a company limited by guarantee and registered charity) in the North Kensington area of London. The trust runs over 20 local supplementary schools through a consortium approach, in addition its economy, sports, environmental and estate management activities. Umbrella trusts may support schools and offer training in governance and management, as well as adding a layer of audit or inspection, but they often would have no involvement with religious classes and may stipulate that funding should not be used to support such classes (Jiwani, 2015).

Using the heuristic device and some implications

This section expands upon how the heuristic can be used in leadership practice and research including identifying, amongst other things, the implications for practice and calls for further

research. The previous section illustrates how the heuristic approximately captures knowledge about which cues to search for in the context of a particular decision (in this case supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations), so school leaders and researchers have enough clues to make decisions (Loock and Hinnen, 2015).

Supplementary school leaders

The heuristic device supports leaders in supplementary schools to locate their organisations within the sector as well as identifying the steps they can take to address issues of sustainability such as those in single leadership organisations. Leaders can consider how they might wish to address this in terms of what they wish to change or develop and what they wish to preserve and maintain, on other words, supporting them as practitioners to make decisions about the future of the school. Equally important, the heuristic supports leaders to approach mainstream schools by explaining what they do, and to be aware of how they might be seen by those mainstream school leaders because of the connections with the religious organisation. School leaders might also consider developing partnerships with other supplementary schools who could complement their own work and future plans as recommended by Cherti and Bradley (2011). These collaborations and partnerships are crucial in a time of disengagement by the state at various levels.

Leaders of mainstream schools

The heuristic device provides support for those leading in mainstreams schools about ways to make connections between the school sectors with greater coordination and cooperative programming (Ramalingam and Griffith, 2015); for example, who to approach in a particular organisational type, such as an umbrella organisation or an independent organisation, and what clues to look for and consider when developing these links. It acknowledges the fears mainstream school leaders may have around arising discourses of quality and lack of Ofsted

inspection of supplementary school and the concern that any links imply support for the religious views or doctrine of the organisation (MHCLG, 2010). The heuristic can also be used by mainstream schools to identify the type of supplementary school that members of their student body may be attending and members of staff may be working in, for example, not dismissing those informal organisations of parents that may be highly significant within the local community. Developing these collaborations and partnerships with supplementary schools is crucial to foster links with the community and promote social inclusion. Mainstream school leaders should not be deterred from forms these with school that have links to religious organisation because of false public perceptions.

Researchers

The heuristic device can be used by researchers to bring a greater understanding of these schools and their associated leadership challenges including their contribution to sustainable education futures and their own sustainability as organisations. With a dearth of knowledge and understanding of these schools, in particular, their governance, leadership and management, researchers need to be engaging in research and not waiting for further information to emerge before they do so. The heuristic gives them clues about what to look for and what to ask about. Researchers have an important role in critically exploring the disengagement of the state, at various levels, in terms of the appreciation of and support for the work of these schools.

Furthermore, further research is needed to elaborate the device in terms of accuracy but, more pertinently its applications in the field, for example, its use in developing case studies of schools for empirical studies drawing on historical and sociology sources and tools (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011). As previously noted, the examples of schools used in this article are drawn exclusively from England but supplementary schools exist throughout the UK and in many other

countries so it would be good to see case studies and larger scale projects involving different geographical areas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a heuristic device has been offered to support leadership practice in supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations and to encourage greater critical engagement with these schools by mainstream school leaders through school partnerships and researchers through future projects, particularly in the areas of governance, leadership and management. This article has responded to calls for support for research to 'construct new genealogies' through careful empirical studies drawing on historical and sociology sources and tools (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011) and recommendations for mainstream school leaders to engage with their local communities by forming partnerships with supplementary schools' (Ramalingam and Griffith, 2015: 3). The exclusion of supplementary schools with religious links from future research and school partnerships needs to be avoided.

A heuristic is helpful for as a device for discovery but is not ever intended to be a comprehensive description and that may be a matter of disappointment for those seeking such. There is also the compromise with the potential for greater bias within a heuristic device (Ehrig and Schmidt, 2019), which needs balancing with the potential for it to foster fast decision making whilst being abandoned when it is no longer needed or superseded. This heuristic needs elaboration from experience but, as Bingham et al. (2019) contend, a heuristic's early forms are more important for the structure they offer rather than their content.

Glimpses of some aspects of the varied and often complex governance, leadership and management arrangements of these schools are provided in the extant literature that has been focus on pedagogy and impact but research is required to explicitly explore these. Possible

topics further research include exploring the perspectives of schools leaders and trustees about ideas and practices of accountability and quality of the educational experience and who they see as providing support and advice in the administration of the schools. It would be interesting to learn more about how do these school leaders and trustees seek to explain how their schools contribute to society (see Szczepek Reed, 2019) especially when there may be some people in government, schools and research bodies which do not have an appreciation of these possibilities. There might well be insights from supplementary schools with connections to religious organisations which could inform and improve practice in other educational settings.

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Appendix: A summary of the heuristic device

This is a summary of the heuristic device that contains clues to look for. It is not a typology with normative or descriptive claims. The order is not intended to indicate a desired and/or inevitable evolutionary progression but acknowledges diversity and complexity.

Informal organisation

Could start with a group of parents who are relatives, friends or attend the same place of worship.

Grows by word of mouth.

Parents may pool funds to pay for expenses rather than charge a set fee.

May contain those with teaching qualifications and experience.

Governance, leadership and management through a single person or collaborative group

Discourse of quality, accountability and inspection may lack relevance or be rejected

Single leader organisation

Possibly set up by someone holding a formal role in a religious organisation.

Does not mean that the students or pupils must attend a specific place of worship and the teaching of religion may not be part of the school's formal curriculum.

Governance, leadership and management may be perceived to lie with the school leader alone though a governing document may exist.

School leader may have safeguarding and legal knowledge from their other role.

May be audited or have some form of quality mark

Can have problems with leadership succession.

Formal independent organisation

Set up as a charitable incorporated organisation; charitable company (limited by guarantee); unincorporated association; or a trust.

With a management committee of trustees or directors, and a governing document.

May range in size from 20 or less, to 100s of students.

In larger organisations, likely to be designated school leaders accountable to the Board for management and quality

May be part of voluntary quality schemes and audits especially if a recipient of a charitable grants.

Considerable variety in how the school is connected to a religious organization.

Umbrella organisation

As part of an association with a place of worship, a school, or a community organisation that already runs family activities and advice services.

The umbrella organisation often has experience of fundraising and has in place a full range of policies and procedures, especially around safeguarding.

May be a sub-unit or project in that they will be under the same governance arrangements as the rest of the organisation and with a sub-budget.

Trustees may be more distant from school activities delegating leadership and management to those within the school.

May support schools and offer training in governance and management, as well as adding a layer of audit.

ⁱ For brevity, the term ‘supplementary’ schools is used in this article with the explanation given above, whilst mindful of the other names used by researchers for these organisations such as complementary, heritage language, or community language schools that may seem interchangeable but are in practice nuanced. For example, the term complementary has been used by some researchers to indicate the schools as complementing mainstream with both types of schools having a complementary function. Others drawn out the nuance of addressing a deficit or lack in the term supplementary that provides an alternative approach as an act of resistance to the failures of mainstream education to provide for the needs of children and young people from different communities (see Andrews, 2016; Maylor et al., 2010; Walters, 2011). For more detailed overviews of how supplementary schools operate including their curriculums and teaching and learning approaches see, for example, Issa and Williams (2009), Jiwani (2015), Kagan et al., (2017).

ⁱⁱ NRCSE training courses help supplementary schools create handbooks for parents, staff members and trustees, covering essential administrative practice and safeguarding policies in line with government guidelines. Trained mentors then work with supplementary schools to help them assemble a portfolio of evidence showing that they provide an effective learning environment, high quality teaching, a record of pupil progress, and suitable resources for learning as well as evaluation and monitoring of the organisation, safe practice and financial probity. The NRCSE has also developed the Ofqual registered Certificate in Teaching in the Supplementary Education Sector, to support and improve standards of teaching in supplementary school. The NRCSE Quality Mark includes standards on teaching and learning, as well as planning, monitoring and evaluation, and management of staff, safeguarding and finances.