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Title: Leadership succession as an aspect of organizational sustainability in complementary schools in England

Anthony Thorpe, University of Roehampton;

Linnet Arthur, Oxford Brookes University;

Ana Souza, Oxford Brookes University.

Corresponding author: Anthony Thorpe a.thorpe@roehampton.ac.uk

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Abstract

The article explores leadership succession as an aspect of organizational sustainability in complementary schools in England as an example of how schools in precarious circumstances seek to ensure their survival and growth. Complementary schools offer part time educational provision 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. We analyse data collected from ten Brazilian and Chinese complementary school leaders in England using concepts from organizational sustainability and leadership succession planning. 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.

Keywords: complementary schools, supplementary schools, organizational sustainability, leadership succession, headteachers, senior leaders

Introduction

The article explores leadership succession as an aspect of organizational sustainability in complementary schools in England as an example of how vulnerable schools in precarious circumstances seek to ensure their survival and growth. We add to the understanding of the practice of leading and managing in distinctive and challenging circumstances through our focus on this, hitherto, little researched context of complementary schools.

Our article draws on data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 10 holders of formal leadership positions from Brazilian and Chinese complementary schools 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 organizations 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 et al., 2008; Nwulu, 2015).

The article begins with a brief introduction to organizational sustainability and leadership succession literature before moving to a short depiction of the context and environment of complementary schools, with particular reference to England. Our methodology for the analysis is outlined. The survey and interview data collected from ten Brazilian and Chinese complementary school leaders in England is then analysed using concepts from organizational sustainability and leadership succession planning. The insights and shortcomings of the applicability of some of the existing ideas are identified and explored with suggestions for further research.

Considering leadership succession within the wider context of organizational sustainability opens up a more nuanced understanding of these schools as vulnerable and fragile organizations 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. We contend that research into complementary school leadership may provide interesting insights to practice from which mainstream leaders and researchers can also learn and we call for more research in this area.

Leadership succession as an aspect of organizational sustainability

In this section, we introduce the ideas around organizational sustainability including the particular understanding of it that is adopted in our analysis and discussion. Leadership succession is then outlined as a particular example within a human resource management approach to organizational sustainability in schools.

Organizational sustainability (sometimes referred to as business sustainability) is a concept that broadly refers to survival, continuation and stability, in other words, keeping the organization 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 and Ramstad, 2005). Established concepts of organizational sustainability involve a number of aspects or dimensions, for example, mission and organizational identity related to strategic planning; business planning for products, services and programmes; human resources and the organizational culture; and financial stability involving ethically sources of monies which would not later prove a threat to the organization's continuation (Colbert and Kurucz, 2007). Recognising the fragility of organizations in order to address risk and unpredictability also helps to illuminate the shortcomings of efficiency and effectiveness models (Bendell, 2014).

Organizational sustainability can be distinguished from the idea of sustainable organizations or implementing 'green' sustainable development. Therefore, Pepper and Wildy's (2009) focus on teachers with responsibility for leading educating for sustainability programmes and themes in a number of secondary schools in Western Australian is something different from the sustaining of a school as an organization which is the focus for this article, though there are links between these (DfE, 2012).

Authors have called for a new approach to organizational sustainability from a Human Resource Management (HRM) 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 and Ramstad, 2005). This new HRM aspect of organizational sustainability requires building leadership capacity that balances and integrates economic, social and environmental factors (Colbert and Kurucz, 2007).

Conway's (2015) view of sustainable school leadership 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 a particular definition of organizational sustainability and why a human resource management approach to organizational sustainability in schools might be fruitful. The HRM organizational sustainability approach that helps to identify concerns with the loss of expertise and experience when leaders step down from their posts is present in Marks's (2013) proposals for addressing the shortage of principals and the loss of corporate knowledge from schools at a time of restructuring.

There is a wide recognition of issues such as the development of future leaders, the handing over of leadership responsibilities and the impact on long-term sustainability of mainstream state and independent schools (Bush, 2011; Russell and Sabina, 2014) and the specific challenges 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 et al., 2011; Donnolly et al., 2018), calls for strategic responses are made to avoid instability across educational organizations (Macpherson, 2010; Marks, 2013; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

The image of passing the baton similar to a relay race is used by Bennett et al. (2011) to signal ideas of continuity and progress in their consideration of principal succession in New Zealand state schools. They identify that capacity building involves not just planning through identifying and supporting possible successors but also the creation of a culture that values leadership development and promotes shared leadership (see also McCulla, 2012).

Perhaps a more relevant context for identifying trends and challenges of relevance to complementary schools lies in research in the context of small schools. Travis's (2016) recommendations for enhancing leadership succession in a semi-rural Local Authority in the north of Scotland include the need for individual schools and the Authority to support effective professional development and review, encourage cultural change to promote teacher leadership, develop leadership development programmes, identify leadership talent, and also clarify roles and expectations in the succession planning process. However, these recommendations do not appear to be tailored to any particular context and are predicated on a large and relatively well-resourced central administration. In contrast, Starr (2015) explores the challenges that school principals face in rural Australian and identifies how they are unconventional compared to more urban settings. Halsey (2011) considers problems with, and ways to improve, the preparation and support of leaders for these types of small schools; and he concludes that more networking opportunities need developing but also a

greater demonstration by government and policy makers of the valuing of the work of these schools and the people who work in them.

A conceptual framework for principal succession is offered by Russell and Sabina (2014) from their context in the USA. After examining actions taken by six school districts drawing on succession planning perspectives, they conclude that having a clear intention and plan to develop future leaders lead to greater effectiveness and higher quality candidates. The 'grow your own' approach has been recommended as a solution to managing leadership succession in a way that builds and sustains an organization's leadership capacity, while at the same time recognising that developing a pool of possible leaders depends on 'the reservoir of leadership capacity in an organization and, perhaps most importantly, the willingness of potential leaders to come forward' (Fink, 2010, p. 124).

Myung et al. (2011) analysed the process of 'tapping' potential leaders to encourage them to consider leadership positions in the USA. They found that nearly three quarters of principals and over half the assistant principals in their study had been 'tapped'. Bryant et al.'s (2017) study focused on how school leaders build leadership capacity in tapped teachers finding the three areas of importance to be those of school culture; enabling authenticity in leadership duties; and mentoring and modelling school leadership practices. Such willingness may well be developed and sustained through the mentoring of potential leaders which is a key theme in Zapeda et al.'s (2011) call to take into account different school contexts when deciding how to promote leadership succession planning.

We return to insights from the ideas of organizational sustainability and leadership succession later in the article but now provide a brief outline of the context and environment of complementary schools in England. The short overview ends by identifying a number of issues related to the organizational sustainability of complementary schools.

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 et al., 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 have tended 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 the mainstream that many working and attending the schools see them as having (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015; Francis et al., 2008; Sneddon, 2017).

They are often established by migrant and minority ethnic groups within a country to teach language, culture, 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 evenings but rarely have their own dedicated premises. They are often run by volunteers, who may or may not receive any remuneration for their work or expenses (Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015; Li Wei, 2006).

There are estimated to be between 3,000 to 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 organizations that are often operating on the peripheries of the vision of policy makers, practitioners and researchers focused on mainstream schooling. Some organizations may be 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 to date in these contexts has been 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 the relationship to 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 has been overlooked and the need to support their continuation and development as organizations (Maylor et al., 2010; Nwulu, 2015, Strand, 2007).

Little research has been conducted into leading, leaders or leadership development in complementary schools yet the small and growing body of work around the professional development of community and/or heritage language teachers and instructors (both pre- and in-service) in the UK and USA may provide some pointers as many head teachers have previously been teachers, often in the school they now lead. This research has sought to

identify what the needs of teachers are, and which methods of development are most appreciated and effective (Anderson, 2008; Aravossitas & Oikonomakou, 2018). Some of this work, such as Anderson (2008) and Cho (2014), is concerned more broadly with the professional development of community language teachers and preparation programmes for a range of school settings; whilst Dorneles and Souza (2016) reflect on the professional development of a community language teacher in a Brazilian Portuguese complementary school in London. All three studies identify sharing professional narratives and networking as a vital element to foster identity and purpose, in addition to developing pedagogical skills, and we return to this insight later.

However, the wider organizational 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. Head teachers, directors of studies and co-ordinators are interviewed or involved in completing questionnaires but the focus 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). All schools involved in the project conducted by Francis et al. (2008) were perceived as 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 et al., 2008) making long term planning difficult. The precarious grasp on logistics and insecure financial arrangements identify many schools as particularly fragile organizations using Bendall's criteria (2016).

In one of the few works to explicitly consider organizational sustainability in relation to complementary schools, Sneddon (2017) explores sustainable approaches to complementary education in England in a chapter within an edited collection concerned with 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 and bilingualism and multilingualism in England have created a 'volatile' policy context and environment for the schools. Her chapter asks how communities develop 'sustainable structures for the language and cultural education of their children' (Sneddon, 2017, p.85), which develops 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 (Deals & Kreeft Payton, 2017). Sneddon links sustainability and institutionalism, the latter concept having been developed and applied in education settings by Miles et al. (1987) in their edited collection that explored 'how innovative educational projects become adopted and embedded into the regular practice of educational institutions, ensuring their stability' (Sneddon, 2017, p.88).

By looking at two contrasting models of complementary education based in the east of London, she identifies the need for any innovative programme to 'become institutionalised in the sense of becoming embedded, sustainable, and replicable within the mainstream local environment' (Sneddon, 2017, p.88). One of the models is that of the Shpresa programme for the Albanian speaking community, which is a charity, and the other model comes from the Tower Hamlets Community Language Service supported by a local government authority. Whilst Sneddon's focus is on what might be termed as the business planning for programmes and services aspects of organizational sustainability, she considers leadership succession in the case of Shpresa by noting that when the founders leave there 'remains an area of risk with respect to sustainability' despite their attempts to mitigate this through having delegated leadership and management roles, establishing procedures, developing administrative systems, and sought 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, 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.

Brazilian and Chinese complementary school leaders and leadership succession

In light of the above, we now add to the literature around leading and managing in complementary schools and leadership succession as an aspect of organizational sustainability in complementary schools in England. Our article draws on data from two separate projects conducted by us, the authors, that were concerned with understanding more about the context and practices of complementary school leaders from which concerns about organizational sustainability emerged including those around leadership succession.

In this analysis, we focus on the survey and interview data collected from ten Brazilian and Chinese complementary school leaders from across the two separate projects that illuminates organizational sustainability and, in particular, the aspect of leadership succession. In line with our qualitative methodology, the quotes we give below are to illustrate a point in a particular context rather than to seek to prove it and claim generalizability for all contexts and times.

The content analysis of the data draws on ideas and concepts from organizational sustainability and leadership succession planning. The exploration of leadership succession in the wider context of organizational sustainability literature and theory helps to think differently from seeing it as a standalone issue within a state funded system, hence leading to a deeper understanding of vulnerable schools as fragile organizations operating in precarious circumstances whilst seeking to ensure their survival and growth.

Head teachers appeared to come from a wider range of professions such as bankers, engineers, lawyers, engineers, nurses as well as teaching in state or public schools. Yet in some cases, the head teacher was professional qualified for another country and in England they were employed in retail or catering as their qualifications were not recognised. Participants often came in contact first with the school, and then later more involved with the work, as a parent as they were interested that their children learnt Portuguese or Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), and then later were more involved with the work 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.'

This story illustrates on one hand the fragility of some schools in the case of the head who leaves following a family bereavement and, on the other hand, tellingly the motivation for taking over the role of head teacher was not one emanating from a feeling of being prepared for the specifics of the role but of a wish to keep the school going because of what she and

her family had received from it. This idea of paying back may be a motivation that is less obvious in mainstream state or independent school settings and needs to be taken into account when looking for new senior leaders and developing capacity in complementary schools. The second theme that emerges is the interviewee's unexpected discovery that she 'loved' undertaking the role despite all its difficulties and maybe because in part of the experience of dealing with the challenges of a small school linked closely to the community (Starr, 2015).

However, a considerable number of school leaders were also the founders of the school leading to a different dynamic for their motivations. The questionnaire to Brazilian complementary schools included that 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 at the school to apply for the position, and another one had been invited by a parent of a child at the school. In contrast to state schools, a sizeable number of the respondents (6/14) had founded their own school and become its de facto leader.

Regarding who undertakes the role of head teacher, frequently interviewees said things along the lines of the issue presenting itself as one of who is going to do it rather than who wants to take on the role especially with sustainability concerns around legal requirements but also the amount of time needed to address these tasks. For example, one head teacher spoke about,

'the problem at the moment is that there are so many regulations, it puts some people off...if I put so much effort in then it's like running a business, so it's a wonder why people want to do it'

The answer to this question may lie in the school leaders finding the challenges of running a small school both stimulating and rewarding (Starr, 2015) and they are driven by the motivation to payback what they have received and contribute to the wider community.

An example of leadership succession in a Chinese complementary school illustrates how the succession appeared to the interviewee as if there was no option or a fait accompli arising from what appeared 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?">'

There has been a move away from postgraduate students from China and South-east Asia teaching and being head teachers leading to greater parental involvement but this also

illustrates that 'tapping' may come from above (such as from the trustees or existing head teacher) but also from the side as colleagues identify and support potential leaders (Myung et al., 2011).

Another example, closer to tapping can be seen in the story of one Chinese school head teacher, 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.'

[Then later...]

'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, we see again the motivation of giving something back that has been received. 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. So too that there might 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).

Much of the literature considers the importance of leadership development (Fink, 2010). However, the forms of development which complementary school leaders find helpful may not be as might be expected in mainstream schools. One Chinese headteacher explained why, after taking on the head teacher role, that 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. 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].'

The first part of the comment reverberates with some points mentioned earlier about professional development. Here pedagogical development is seen as crucial to their leadership development enabling them to sustain and development the school as an organization. Such an importance on pedagogy may be in sharp contrast with many school leaders in the state sector who have most likely been teachers and consider themselves proficient and knowledgeable but seek specific, and often generic, leadership development; some complementary school leaders felt more confident in administrative and leadership tasks from their professional experience but lacked experience and training in school teaching. A Brazilian head teacher had a very similar concern about her lack of experience in mainstream schools and formal qualifications as a teacher. The second part of the

comment links with the ideas around shared leadership practices and the acknowledgement of the contribution of others to the practice of leading and managing (Bryant et al, 2017).

Some interviewees had concerns about succession and linked these to their worries about the longevity of the school. As one Brazilian school leader explained, 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.'

As another headteacher put it:

'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 and longer-term planning for the school, not as a threat but to encourage people to come forward ahead of them in the knowledge that they will be supported (Russell and Sabina, 2014). This planning may not necessarily be laid down in written documents.

At another Brazilian school, the headteacher saw involving the parents in order to ensure the continuation of the school which links to earlier ideas of tapping and capacity building:

'Then the other mothers, for fear it would close down, it'd end, they 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 heads expressed an interest in developing the school's staff, but they saw themselves as constrained from sending them on external courses due to a lack of finance. Some heads 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. There were opportunities for members of staff to gain experience and promotion within the school, 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.' (S2).

Once again the motivations may be different in complementary schools but they again echo ideas from the wider literature around shared leadership and authentic opportunity to try out leadership roles in a variety of ways (Bryant et al., 2017).

Discussion

Exploring leadership succession within the wider context of organizational sustainability literature and theory, rather than as a standalone issue within a state funded system, allows for a more nuanced understanding to emerge of fragile organizations and what is involved in the practices of seeking to ensure these schools can survive and grow often in precarious circumstances. 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 Payton, 2017). The concerns that researchers and practitioners have raised about financial shortages may be the symptom of something else within the organization rather than containing the whole situation, therefore, the insights of organizational sustainability may help to understand the wider organizational context and suggest that tackling the underlying structures may well be a better way to mitigate financial worries and leadership shortages.

Not of all the literature on organizational sustainability and leadership succession appears to be helpful in illuminating the situation of leaders in complementary schools and suggesting ways forward especially where the authors have assumed a short to medium term stability of the organization that may well be applicable to state funded and established independent schools. The recognition also highlights a general problem and limitation in the assumptions of models developed for public/state funded schools. It seems an important point for wider work on school sustainability including leadership succession to at least hedge their comments and recommendations with reference to specific contexts in which they are more likely to be applicable.

In commercial business contexts, new ideas of organizational sustainability have sought to identify the limits of short-term profit values and argued that a moral purpose and social vision was needed by business leaders (Colbert and Kurucz, 2007). However, the general assumption that the education of children and young people is a moral endeavour means that schools, especially in the non-profit sector, might approach the topic somewhat differently as they focus on the aspects of organizational sustainability that they perceive they lack such as strategic planning and it would be unhelpful for research to only look at ecologically, 'green' issues for schools whilst not addressing the other factors to be balanced in sustaining an organization (Colbert & Krucz, 2007).

Large-scale solutions to challenges around leadership succession and organizational sustainability developed in, or for, well-funded stated contexts may well not be applicable to smaller schools such as complementary schools, which receive little, if any, monies from the

public purse. Our analysis suggests that in complementary schools there are different generative mechanisms operating and emerging within the specific school context. Recognising that there may be different vulnerabilities in different contexts is important to counter assumptions and attempts to offer monolithic solutions to organizational instability (Sneddon, 2017; Zepeda et al., 2011). For example, the special circumstances of organizations that are new and have only ever been led by the founder need to be considered and explored in the case of leadership succession in complementary schools.

The interviews with school leaders suggest that there may well be planning and developing a school vision (Russell and Sabina, 2014) though this is not necessarily written down in documents and more likely to be shared through verbal discussion in formal meetings but also informal, every day conversations. However, the leaders may not necessarily realise the ways they are undertaking this planning and so reducing the likelihood of having the desired outcome of ensuring leadership succession and sustaining the organization, which move one to the topic of appropriate leadership development.

Training for existing mainstream school leaders and generic commercial leadership preparation programmes are not the whole answer to building leadership capacity in complementary schools because the structures and mechanisms at work in the context may have greater influence on succession including school culture. The importance of networking and collaboration for small school leaders identified by Starr (2015) amongst others may have much relevance though the networks might not be the ones expected as was the case for Chinese school head teacher who undertook a PGCE to help him with his leadership role. Therefore, the importance of pedagogical development in professional development of some current complementary school leaders should not be overlooked and this might have implications for mainstream school leaders too.

Conclusion

In this article, we have added to the understanding of the practice of leading and managing in distinctive and challenging circumstances through our focus on this, hitherto, little researched context of complementary schools and so too fostering a better understanding of the ways in which schools in diverse and challenging contexts can seek to ensure their survival and growth. Research into complementary school leadership may provide interesting insights to practice from which mainstream leaders and researchers can also learn and we call for more research in this area to generate new perspectives and insights about theory and practice in the wider field.

By exploring leadership succession within the wider context of organizational sustainability literature and theory, rather than as a standalone issue within a state funded system, we have offered a more nuanced understanding of fragile organizations and what is involved in the practices of seeking to ensure these schools often in precarious circumstances can survive and grow. More research is needed into practice (and not just proffering models) of leadership succession planning (Zapeda et al., 2011).

Possible concerns around equality and diversity need to be thought through in that whilst the anecdotes of tapping and willing volunteers may raise a concern that only certain people will be approached or encouraged to put themselves forward, the precarity of the situations around succession given above may equally suggest that those taking up roles might be from a wider range of background than those appointed through a more formal system of selection and appointment that often favours a much narrower range.

The next steps in terms of research should be to explore leadership succession further but also the other elements of organizational sustainability. We spoke only to senior leaders in post and in schools that were still operating so it would be interesting to collect data from those involved with schools that had now closed down and where there had been no leadership succession.

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i 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 and Souza, 2017) was funded by BELMAS (The British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society) had two phases. The first phase involved the collection of data through a survey to develop school profiles and the second used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect experiences and views of leadership from practitioners in some of the schools. The Chinese complementary school leaders project involved semi-structured interviews with a small number of head teachers (Thorpe, 2011).