

Successful Models for Supplementary Schools

By Foezul Ali, Chairman of Nida Trust

The following paper was submitted on 21st April 2007, as part of the 'Educating the Young Child' conference organised by the Quest Foundation for Learning, at the Kensington Town Hall, London.

Introduction

Supplementary education has been in existence for a long time in the UK and the significance of it continues to grow steadily over the recent years. The positive contribution made by supplementary schools have been recognized by the government officials. In a recent visit by Lord Adonis, Parliamentary Under – Secretary of state for schools, to the Resource Unit for supplementary and mother – tongue schools clearly acknowledged the positive impacts made by supplementary education to many pupils' lives.

In this paper, I will outline the following:

1. Historical development of supplementary education in the UK
2. Aims of supplementary education
3. Understanding the nature of supplementary education in the Muslim community
4. Reasons for establishing supplementary schools for Muslim pupils
5. Challenges faced by supplementary education

Historical development of supplementary education in the UK

Supplementary education in Britain began in the late 19th century with the Catholic community. The main focus of supplementary education was to pass on the religious and cultural values of their community to the future generations. These schools were often held in the evenings and at the weekends. In most cases, supplementary education was initiated by the Catholic church for a number of reasons. These projects were established to protect the Catholic youths from losing their religious and cultural heritage because they were growing up in a culture which did not reflect their views and values fully. Furthermore, a large percentage of young Catholics attended Church of England schools which further supported the significance of supplementary education. The intensity of supplementary education was somewhat reduced by the introduction of full time Catholic educational institutions.

As the Catholic community focused more on the full time educational institutions, a new migrate community began to concentrate on supplementary education. This community (European Jews) who fled the certain European lands to seek protection in the UK due to war and persecution. Again their main focus was to pass on the traditions, values, culture and religion to their future generations so that the community can remain as a unit. The Jewish community soon began to establish their own full time independent educational institutions, which further developed on the supplementary model. We can still see that the Jewish communities run supplementary educational institutions along with full time schools even today.

The above model was duplicated by the Chinese community to an extent in the early and mid 20th century. However, this community remained relatively unsuccessful in establishing full time education institutions. In the 1960's, the Muslim community arrived into the UK, primarily from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. These new arrivals were often from rural areas with little formal education. Generally speaking, their main aim was to earn money to support their family back in the country of their origin. Furthermore, they did not bring their families to this country because they believed that their family will be polluted by the "Kufr culture". Their intention was to earn some money and then go back to the country of their origin to settle permanently. Unfortunately, this did not happen. They continued to stay here and eventually realized that they have no other choice but to bring their families over to join them. In early 1970's, families from the subcontinent countries began to arrive into the UK.

The arrival of women and children posed a new challenge for the Muslim community. The community leaders began to think how they can continue their traditions, culture, values and religion to their children. More significantly, they were concerned about protecting their children from the “Kufr culture”. To ensure that their children are protected, they established madrasas which were modeled in line with their country of origin. The main purpose of these madrasas was to get the youth to memorise the Qur’an and learn some basic aspects of their faith. These institutions continue to exist today catering for pupils’ from all different Muslim communities.

However, there has been some change in the last few years. The Muslim community has realized that pupils from Muslim communities (i.e. Bangladeshi & Pakistani pupils) are amongst the lowest achievers in the UK with the GCSE pass rate well below the national average. To counter act this problem some section of the Muslim community have started to establish supplementary schools that focused on the religious and cultural subjects and the core subjects (i.e. English, Maths & Science). The main purpose of these institutions is to enrich the Muslim pupils culturally so that they are well established in terms of their identity and at the same time create a platform where they can enhance their chances of success academically.

Aims of supplementary education

Supplementary education is often referred to as Complementary education. This line of thinking states that supplementary schools complement the work of the mainstream educational institutions. This view also advocates that supplementary schools provide a niche service which the mainstream schools are unable to provide due to many logistical problems.

Another view states that supplementary schools create extra burden on pupils and it is for this reason the net advantage from such education is not very high. Associates of this line of thinking state that pupils should have more time to play and engage in recreational activities rather than academic studies. Although, this view has some weight but it lacks a clear understanding of the concept of supplementary education. Supplementary education does not necessarily have to focus on academic studies. I believe that it is essential that we do not make supplementary education regimental because we will lose the joy of supplementary education.

People set up supplementary schools for many reasons. It is very difficult to narrow down the different aims of these schools but broadly speaking they aim to provide the following:

1. A platform for religious and cultural development
2. A platform for academic support
3. A platform for personal development

Understanding the nature of supplementary education in the Muslim community

Supplementary schools in the Muslim community can be classified into three main categories:

- 1) Secular schools
- 2) Religious – Secular schools
- 3) Religious schools

Secular schools

These institutions primarily focus on the secular subjects. They do not emphasis very much on the religious aspect of education. They provide support mainly on the core subjects. They tend to base their pedagogical practice in line with secularist education theories.

Religious – Secular Schools

These institutions believe that pupils need both form of education, religious and secular in order to develop their personality in a balance fashion. They say that the religious values of the pupils are significant in determining the academic achievement. They tend to employ good practices both from the secular educationists and the Muslim educationists.

Religious Schools

They are often referred to as Madrasas. These institutions focus mainly on the memorization of the Holy Qur'an and on certain aspects of the Islamic faith. They tend to use a similar model to that of some Muslim countries (i.e. the subcontinent). The process of delivery is normally in a rote form.

Reasons for establishing supplementary schools for Muslim pupils

I believe that the Muslim community should establish more supplementary schools for a number of reasons:

- 1) Supplementary schools will help to counter – act the underachievement of Muslim pupils in the mainstream schools.
- 2) Supplementary schools will help them to develop their cultural and religious identity which is often not met by the mainstream schools.
- 3) Supplementary schools will enable the community to get involved more in education
- 4) Supplementary schools will provide role models from the community

Challenges faced by supplementary education

Supplementary schools are often set up by people who have good intentions to support the youth of our community to better themselves so that they have more opportunities in the future. Despite the good intentions of the people concerned, supplementary schools face many challenges. These include:

- 1) **Limited funding** – Many schools find it difficult to provide adequate service due to lack of funding. This is problem is further intensified by the fact that many people who run these institutions lack the skills and the knowledge of raising funds.
- 2) **Lack of qualified teachers** – Many schools use local volunteers to teach the different aspect of the curriculum. Although, this is considered to be a good thing from a community engagement point of view but from the education point of view it may not necessarily be the best method. This is because the volunteers may not have the relevant understanding of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment issues.
- 3) **Lack of understanding of the curriculum** – many people who run these institutions may not necessarily be educationists. They may lack clear understanding of the specific requirements of the curriculum
- 4) **Developing strong links with the mainstream schools** – Many supplementary schools find it difficult to develop strong links with the state schools because it creates more paper work and adds further on the logistical processes of the supplementary schools
- 5) **Developing clear progression/tracking systems** – Often many supplementary schools find it difficult to establish good progress and tracking systems in order to ensure that the pupils are making a steady progress.

Nida Trust Supplementary education support service

Nida Trust believes that supplementary education can have a significant positive effect on the learning of pupils. To ensure that the supplementary schools become well established institutions that continues to provide high class service to our youngsters, the Trust has launched this support service. This service includes:

- 1) Inset for teachers
- 2) Advice on progression/tracking systems
- 3) Guidance on fund raising
- 4) Creating a platform for the teachers to share good practices.