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# **Place-based governance and leadership in England: learning from four case studies**

**SESLIP AD Education Network**

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Mourshed et al (2010) identify three roles:

- targeted hands-on support to schools
- a buffer between the school and the centre
- a channel to share and integrate improvements across schools.

### Strategic co-ordination & improvement

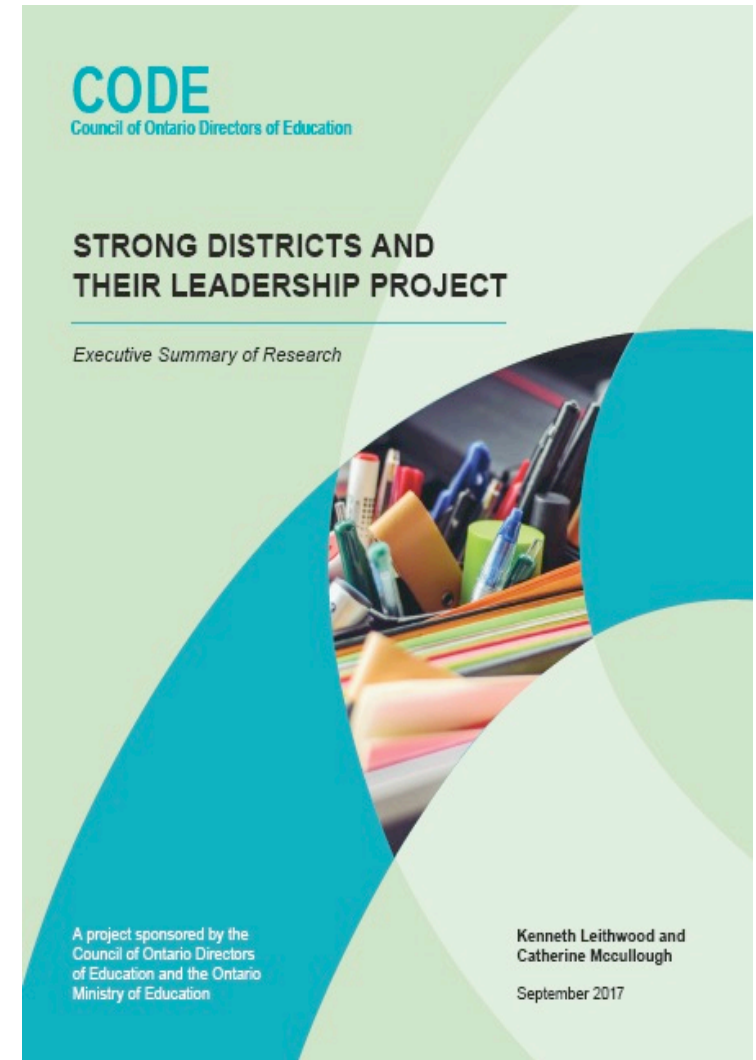
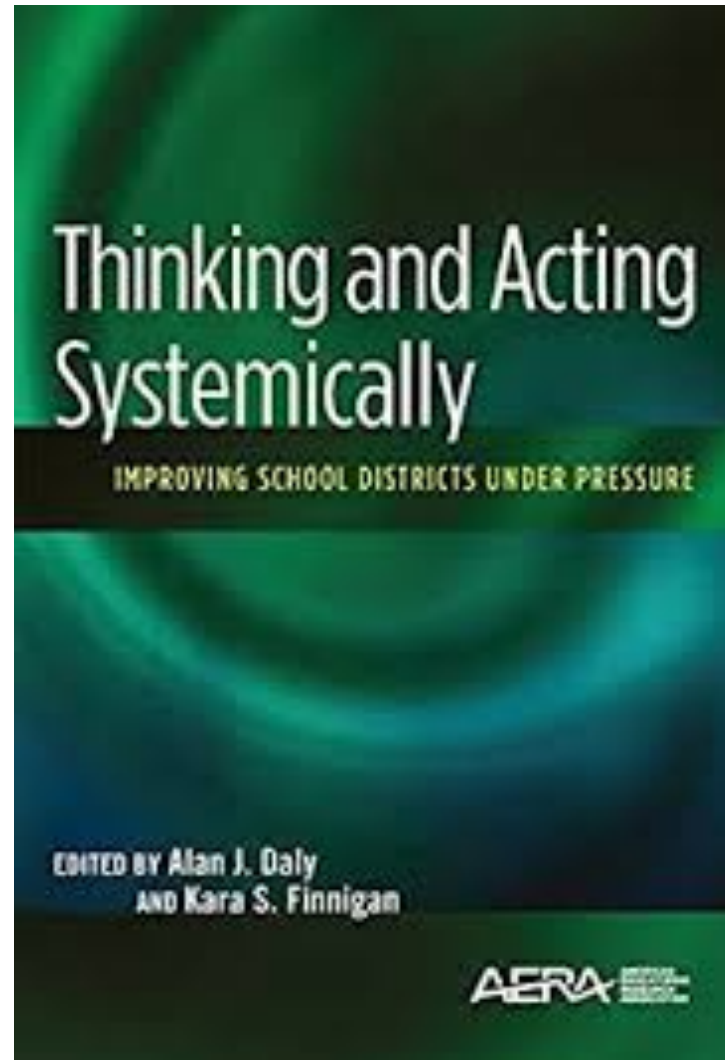
- Place planning
- Provision for vulnerable pupils
- Aligning education with broader children's services offer
- Commissioning services (HR, governor development)
- Tracking school performance
- Holding schools to account
- Commissioning support for specific schools
- Ensuring teacher supply
- Ensuring leadership supply/succession

### Capacity building and brokerage

- Working together on curriculum planning/development
- Observing, coaching and developing each other – inc peer review
- Facilitating work on inquiry-led learning
- Recruiting and training new teachers
- Running coaching/CPD programmes
- Running leadership programmes
- Deploying leaders and expert teachers
- Facilitating access to expertise



# High performing/high equity systems have *coherent* middle tiers





# England's new, more complex and entrepreneurial middle

Multiple 'middle tier' players, with:

1. (Sometimes) competing & (often) overlapping remits, boundaries & claims to legitimacy
2. Differing levels of accountability, knowledge and capacity for supporting schools

Implications:

1. Fragmentation
2. Balkanisation
3. Commodification of knowledge/expertise
4. Inequalities
5. Emergence of locality partnerships in some areas

Typical 'middle tier' players:

- Regional School Commissioner
- Local Authority
- Ofsted Regional Director
- Multi-Academy Trusts
- Teaching School Alliances/Hubs
- School partnerships/clusters
- Dioceses
- Informal networks
- Government funded providers
- Primary/Secondary Heads groups
- Project/area-based initiatives/roles
- Locality-wide partnership/s



## Different LA responses – when, where and how to ‘step back’?

I see different things happening nationally. Some (LAs) where they have taken everything out and they are starting to build it up again, but that having taken it all out, from what I can see, there developed in the system a kind of stand-on-your-own-two-feet mentality, which has led schools to group together to work out how to do it for themselves. So be less dependent, which I think has some strengths in it.

Education Director, Local Authority



# Streeck and Thelen's path dependency model (2005)

		Results of change	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
Processes of change	Incremental		
	Abrupt		

# Four localities in England

		Results of change	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
Processes of change	Incremental	<u>Western</u> : gradual evolution away from a 'dependency culture' on the LA	
	Abrupt		



# Four localities in England

		Results of change	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
Processes of change	Incremental		
	Abrupt	<u>Northern</u> : LA created an Education Partnership in 2010, having ‘foreseen its own demise’	



# Four localities in England

		Results of change	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
Processes of change	Incremental		<u>Eastern</u> : new LA team reshapes approach and works to build coherence following historic poor relationships with schools and fragmentation caused by academisation
	Abrupt		

# Four localities in England

		Results of change	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
Processes of change	Incremental		
	Abrupt		<u>Suburban</u> : Soviet-style LA collapse leads to fragmentation



# Learning from England's 'natural experiment'

'Middle tier' is being reshaped but not removed – a new 'multi-dimensional middle' (Crawford et al, 2020) is emerging.

'Middle tier' responses to national policy shifts are not uniform. Partially reflects historical and contextual factors but presence or absence of 'middle tier' leadership agency, especially from LAs, is critical for a collective, place-based focus.

Different 'middle tier' responses may be associated with different outcomes.

Leading and managing in this new middle requires new skills and qualities. Engaging and facilitating contributions from multiple stakeholders is key. LA leaders can also draw on remaining hierarchical and market-management roles – particularly in pursuit of equity. 'Stepping back' and hoping schools will 'self-improve' appears problematic.



Oldham Learning - a new system-led partnership to 'set direction for school improvement'. Established September 2020 with Foundation Board. Proposal emerged from the Oldham Education Improvement Strategy Group (2019-20) - 30 MAT & maintained school leaders sponsored by LA, OA, Oldham Education Partnership & RSC.

Importance of:

- 'Case for change' and 'What are we trying to achieve?' – shared acknowledgement of performance/culture issues and aspiration for new approach
- Sponsorship of key players, capitalising on Opportunity Area £ and capacity
- Building awareness of wider partnership models and possibilities for change
- Covid challenges – but relationships built via strat group helped coherent response.

Main challenge now is to define a meaningful 'school improvement' model that works for all, with associated funding model once OA funding ends.





The international research into effective school districts suggests that coherence is key to success.

In England, many/most MATs and LAs are working to achieve *internal* coherence, but this can mean that there is increasing incoherence *between* the MATs/SATs and LA models that operate in a single locality.

1. Where did you locate your LA locality on the Streeck and Thelen grid? Why? What are the implications?
2. How do leaders from the various middle tier bodies (eg LA, MATs etc) operating in your locality work together? What more could you/the LA do to shape coherence in this context?



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Thank you.

