



University of
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

LocalEd:

Developing New Locality Models for English Schools

Lessons from the evaluation of locality working

Toby Greany and Susan Cousin
University of Nottingham


30th January 2025



1. A shared commitment to the locality
2. Leadership and governance of the partnership
3. Clarity of partnership focus and approach
4. Sustainability and impact



Evaluation design – an improvement science approach

<p>How does this locality assess its own progress/impact?</p> <p>Any changes during project period?</p> <p>How: Use locality-developed (and assessed) KPIs Sources: Locality action plans reported to ISOS</p>	<p>[Locality Name]</p> 	<p>How does this locality compare with criteria for locality working drawn from the evidence base?</p> <p>Any changes during project period?</p> <p>How: Compare with criteria from literature – i) shared commitment ii) leadership & governance, iii) clarity of focus & approach, iv) sustainability & impact Sources: Surveys, evaluation workshops and interviews</p>
<p>Overall:</p> <p>What have we learned about leading successful locality working?</p> <p>Sources: Nine locality case studies, cross case analysis within and across the three pilot areas</p>		



	Year 1 (2022-23)	Year 2 (2023-24)	Total
Interviews with locality pilot leads	Summer 2022 x 9 Summer 2023 x 9	Summer 2024 x 9	27 interviews
Interviews with Advisory Team pilot leads	Summer 2023 x 3	Summer/autumn 2024 x 4	7 interviews
Interviews with key stakeholders in each locality		Spring 2024: Pilot 1 = 28; Pilot 2 = 9; Pilot 3 = 35	72 interviews
Evaluation workshops with stakeholders in each locality	Autumn 2022 x 7		7 workshops (~ 50 participants)
Survey	Winter 2022/23		202 responses
Observations of Advisory Team-run workshops	8 workshops	8 workshops	16 workshops observed
Observations of events and activities	4 observations	4 observations	8 observations
Documentary evidence	Locality plans and reports, Ofsted reports, presentations and websites etc.		



- Nine localities and three pilot themes – scale, complexity and nuance
- Localities – important differences in size, contexts, historic relationships & structures (LAs, CA, ‘school-led’ partnerships)
- Localities – significant capacity challenges, but all have sustained engagement despite lack of additional funding for this work.
- AECT Team (Isos Partnership/Christine Gilbert + Jonathan Crossley-Holland) support and facilitation - credibility and expertise; shared methodology for structuring the thinking and work; advising, challenging and supporting individual pilot leads; facilitation of the termly action learning workshops and annual conferences
- Importance of peer support and communities of practice, esp in pilots 1 and 3



Pilot 1 - Aspirational place-focussed visions & straplines shared by LAs and schools. Commitment to equity and inclusion. Growing levels of trust reported through an emphasis on collaborative working to address challenges around consistency, coherence, commitment.

Pilot 2 - North of Tyne Combined Authority - strategy co-produced with education leads in 3 LAs & wider stakeholders. Commitment to address disadvantage in NE. Over 266 schools and 15 Trusts participating in funded projects.

Pilot 3 - 'School-led' partnerships had different starting points (e.g. LA relationship, core staffing, membership models). Common challenges: SEND, pupil numbers, isolated schools/MATs, staff recruitment/capacity. Majority of schools engaged, but with some specific challenges in each locality.



Pilot 1 - LA leaders working through partnership groups & within established reporting structures. Variability in political mandate and approach to quality monitoring for projects. Models of integrated services at different stages of maturity.

Pilot 2 - NTCA team, strong political support and governance via elected Mayor and Cabinet and Education Directors Strategy Group. Stakeholder collaboration 'finding the niches'.

Pilot 3 - Established governance groups and core staff leadership + distributed teams in formally constituted partnerships. Milton Keynes - secondary head + volunteer co-ordinator + Project Development Group. Political mandate - complex in 3 localities.



Pilot 1 – Vulnerable children - attendance a ‘common cause’, a priority for schools and all services. Clear theory of action – e.g. agreeing definition of ‘vulnerability’, establishing data systems, ‘insights’ work to understand the experiences of children and families. Prototyping new ways of working with vulnerable families.

Pilot 2 - School improvement. Complementing LA/trust roles. Focused on five strands (year 1) then three strands (year 2) prioritised in response to stakeholder need.

Pilot 3 - Strengthening professional accountability. Focus on evaluations of ‘quality’ education and how it can best be developed - school self-evaluation, peer enquiry and review, school reports/profiles. Growing role for pupil and parent voice.



Pilot 1 – Large attendance gains for individuals, some improvements in LA attendance trends. Case studies 'hold up a mirror' to incentivise system change.

Pilot 2 – Success/reputation brings greater opt-in, wider sharing of good practice, VfM via economies of scale and enhancing impact of other initiatives (e.g. oracy).

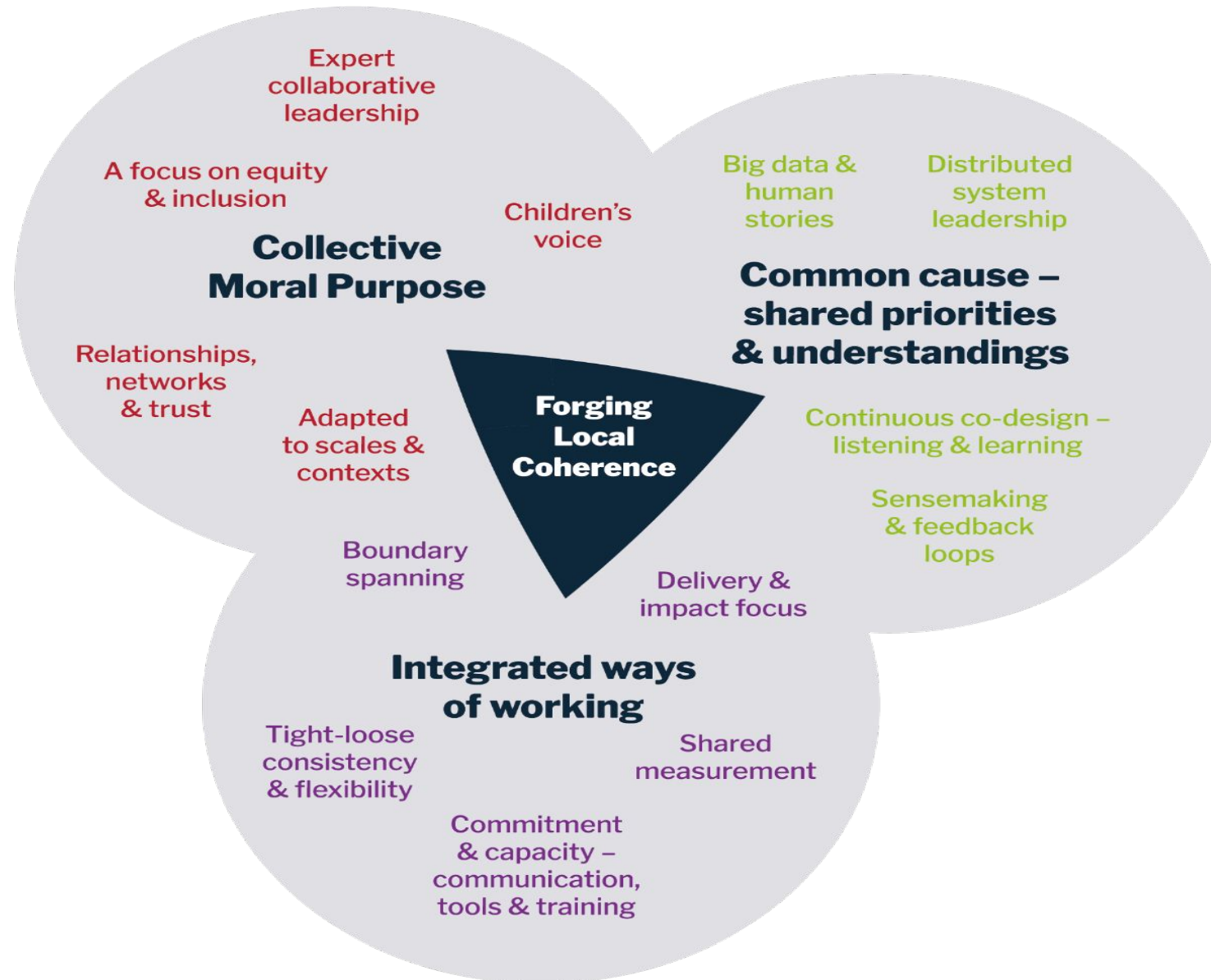
Pilot 3 - Good evidence of engagement and new ways of working. Ealing & Sheffield's own evaluations show positive impact from this and wider work.

Overall:

- Scale-up, culture change and embedding new ways of working: ongoing process, but lots of learning around what does/does not work (e.g. co-location, data systems, directories, training, boundary-spanning roles, toolkits etc)
- Many of the benefits of locality working remain intangible / hard to measure – e.g. networks, knowledge sharing, trust and reciprocity.



LocalEd: What are we learning about leading successful locality working?





This locality (still) matters and 'we' have a collective responsibility to ensure that all children here succeed.



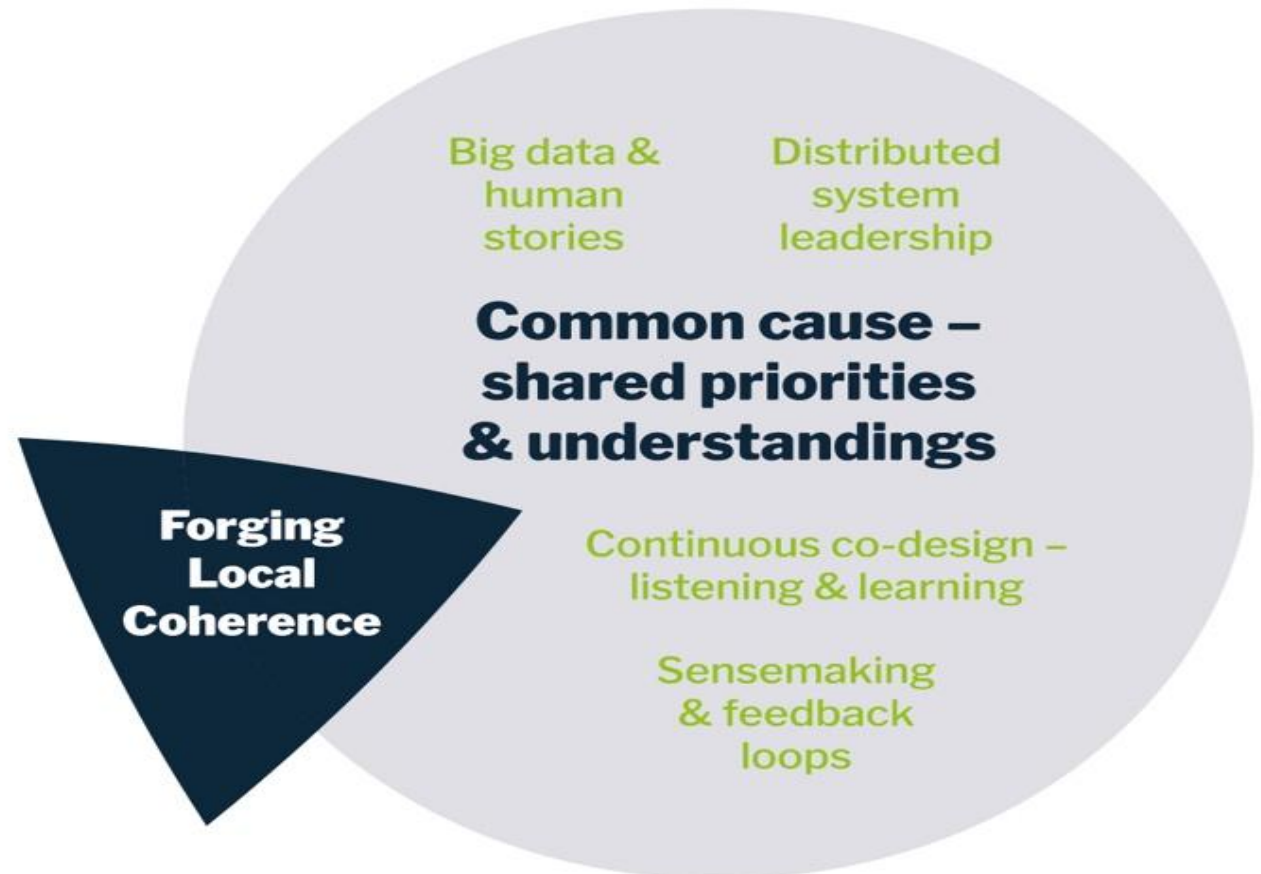
- **Expert collaborative leadership:** Credible, expert and trusted role models. Transformational leadership – horizon scanning, strategic thinking, courageous, tenacious & values-driven.
- **A focus on equity and inclusion**
- **Adapted to scales and contexts:** Scale-jumping. Local knowledge & relationships - understanding different perspectives.
- **Children's (and parents') voice**
- **Relationships, networks and trust:** overcoming professional isolation.



Forging Local Coherence – Common Cause

- **Big data and human stories:** Combining ‘big data’ with ‘granular’ case studies - a mirror to the system. Builds shared understanding & emotional commitment.
- **Continuous co-design – listening and learning:** convening diverse professionals to develop shared understandings and approaches.
- **Sensemaking and feedback loops:** key leaders come together to reflect on evidence & experience.
- **Distributed system leadership:** Leaders take ownership of ‘common cause’ - taking individual & collective action.

Shared priority/priorities reflecting a well-developed understanding of complex local challenges which require – and galvanise - collective action.





Professionals from diverse organisations collaborate – adopting shared language, systems, processes, tools – leading to greater efficiency & effectiveness.



- **Tight-loose:** Balancing agency, consistency & flexibility.
- **Shared measurement:** Increases scope for collective learning on progress & barriers to success.
- **Boundary spanning:** Individuals who help to overcome silos & move knowledge & expertise around.
- **Commitment and capacity:** Scaling up learning by codifying & sharing via formal training, networks & tools.
- **Delivery and impact focus:** articulating how progress being made & how impact can be achieved – while allowing flexibility & ownership.



- Some areas of practice more developed than others – developing voice and agency for pupils, parents and the most vulnerable, remains challenging
- Value of the LocalEd ‘improvement science’ approach to system learning and improvement – engaging diverse practitioners and experts in shared problem solving. Scope to adopt this approach across wider areas of policy and practice?
- Clear need to value and strengthen locality leadership – a possible focus for the DfE’s Excellence in Leadership programme?
- Wider implications for devolution, local expectations and agency – how to make ‘forging local coherence’ and the development of consistently high-quality local partnerships a core focus for policy in future?