

Article

A Genealogy toward Methodic Doubts in Educational Leadership Research

Ira Bogotch 

Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, Florida Atlantic University,
Boca Raton, FL 33431, USA; ibogotch@fau.edu

Abstract: In this critical narrative essay, titled A Genealogy Toward Methodic Doubts, I ask readers not only how and why educational leadership research(ers) detoured from the rigorous pursuits of truths, but also how and why I had missed the signposts which might have alerted me and others that our continuing practices, even with recognizing methodological limitations, were flawed. The empirical examples presented here come mostly from US policies, Western theories, and traditional methods, but likely apply to other contexts worldwide.

Keywords: genealogy; methodic doubts; research methods; theory-method interactions; counter-hegemonic narrative

1. The Purpose(s)

A rule of thumb in writing is to stick to what you know best. In this case, what I know best about the field of educational leadership comes from my readings of the literature, direct observations, collegial relationships, and professional experiences. But in what sense are any of these ways of knowing valid, trustworthy, and reliable as research? All of us have been professionally socialized to know and practice the strict rules of protecting human subjects, designing conceptual frameworks, and asking research questions, followed by research methods and procedures. We then acknowledge the study's limitations and delimitations and remain ethical concerning our participants and our uses of language.

Genealogy can be traced historically through ideas, relationships, and experiences. None of us develop ideas in isolation. We are dependent and interdependent upon others to ignite our minds to diverse ways of knowing. As such, the educational leadership researchers cited throughout this essay have all become members of my academic family. These scholars have been my teachers and my sources of inspiration. At the same time, the historian-philosopher Michel Foucault [1] reminded us that words and ideas change over time and across space. History is as much about the continuity of ideas as it is about the discontinuous surprises and new directions. These twists and turns, too, are part of the genealogy of educational leadership.

Therefore, our combined education from both research and practice is a reckoning of all we have accomplished up to the present. As research, it also points to where we might travel next. At the same time, the repeated calling for the transformation of the field of educational leadership feels, to me, like Groundhog's Day, or as Yogi Berra (Hall of Fame catcher for the New York Yankees baseball team post WWII into the 1960s) supposedly said, "It's *déjà vu* all over again". That is, we seem to repeat ourselves inside the established practices of formatting, academic writing, peer-reviewing, and publishing journal articles that too often confirm already existing knowledge. That, of course, is not the purpose of research nor the function of scholarly journals. Hence, methodic doubt is meant to problematize, ask critical questions, maintain skepticism, and insist that our educational leadership research rigorously pursue truths.

Skepticism as a philosophical disposition has always served scholarship well. In many of my previous conceptual and empirical studies, I have adapted critical theoretical,



Citation: Bogotch, I. A Genealogy toward Methodic Doubts in Educational Leadership Research. *Educ. Sci.* **2024**, *14*, 493. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050493>

Academic Editor: Daniel Muijs

Received: 2 March 2024

Revised: 21 April 2024

Accepted: 1 May 2024

Published: 4 May 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

postmodern, and post-structural approaches in my analyses and interpretations. But what I had failed to do explicitly was acknowledge my values and underlying assumptions, my positionality, and my epistemologies to question the use of those methodologies to answer research questions. Had I or the field of educational leadership done so, then methods themselves would have risen to the same level of significance as leadership theories. In plain English, academic scholarship calls for iterative processing between specific theories and chosen methods [2].

Until recently [3], I did not try to practice *theory-method interactions*, an idea central to Le and Schmid [2]. I relied heavily on the “usual suspects” methodologically, reflexively reaching for methods texts regardless of the leadership theory under investigation. As I grew more confident as a researcher, I did not wean myself away from these same “usual suspects” or look to bring the same innovative creativity in thinking about methods. I did not make the distinction between learning to do research and researching to learn. For example, as I looked for what might be new understandings of leadership by interrogating the construct of social justice, a new construct in the early aughts, I still relied upon traditional research methods, qualitatively and quantitatively. In other words, although the theoretical construct had changed, my methods had remained the same as those used previously to validate traditional theories of leadership. For this reason, I encourage researchers regardless of their epistemologies or ontologies to experiment and discover the methodologist in us by seeking out *unusual suspects*, some of whom may be hiding in plain sight. In so doing, we dissolve the uncritical distinctions made between those labeled theorists and those labeled methodologists who dominate the profession of educational leadership research. This state of affairs is not true of all researchers, but true enough to limit and delimit our findings. Therefore, I am asking, should not the phrase *educational leadership researchers* suffice?

Let me restate my premise: I do not think the problems of educational leadership are theoretical. There have been brilliant leadership ideas coming from the best and the brightest in our profession for over the one-hundred-year history of our field. To me, the problems lie with methodologies in terms of conceptualizing research designs, interacting with participants, and presenting findings in original and creative ways. One significant hallmark of the field of educational leadership itself is its proximity to power structures and individuals who influence and control the thinking and behaviors of others. This specific privileged position applies to researchers as well. That is, how power operates should encourage us, not inhibit us, to engage in more creative and innovative thinking methodologically.

Yet, that is not what educational leadership researchers have done. Unlike those seated near power, the field has followed the rules of the game concerning research activities and methods: that is, conducting empirical and/or conceptual studies, using quantitative and qualitative methods, publishing in academic presses and scholarly journals, reviewing manuscripts, and revising manuscripts as if all of the above were not prescriptive or formulaic. Moreover, all of the above are entered into the curriculum vita as if such activities themselves quench the thirst for knowledge and potentially transform the field of educational leadership. And even when the field stays in place, we continue doing what we have done previously. In my research journey, I rushed some studies to publication before they were ready. I turned my tentative and hypothetical findings into so-called conclusions (often because that was what editors and peer reviewers had requested). Therefore, if we seriously engage in transforming educational leadership, we must do so through our socially re-constructed thoughts and actions. What now follows are illustrations of how tradition and custom trumped experimentation and trial and error. Enough of romantic notions of transformation!

2. Limitations, in Passing: My Call(ing)

I believe that we are masters at telling partial truths even as we warn readers to view our empirical results cautiously. Education research, unlike poetry, does not favor ambiguity. Yet, partial truths of school leadership mask the full range of values and assumptions

of school leaders, teachers, counselors, etc. The partial truths, too, do not often factor into the historical and contextual information underlying policies and school regulations. Furthermore, in research, our self-reported data from surveys or phenomenologically grounded interviews are often analyzed linearly and coded thematically. Following prescribed methods and procedures, we report one-dimensional findings that do not capture the complexity, messiness, or subjectivities of human affairs within or beyond schools [4,5]. One unintended effect of scholarly publications is that readers will assume more than the evidence presented despite our cautionary limitations. For this reason, we publish statistically significant findings, but not the converse. The Le and Schmid [2] question, again, is how might we be more explicit in terms of our assumptions, values, positionality, and epistemologies while holding to the contingencies of history and contexts. My short answer is that it is problematic, necessitating skepticism: that is, seeking to transform educational leadership on the one hand, and maintaining “methodic doubts” on the other [3].

Practically, I am calling for educational leadership researchers to move away from the idea of *choosing* an already existing method to creatively *developing* specific methods *tailored* explicitly to our hypothesized theories. I believe that despite all the literature on research methods as innovations, our choices in educational leadership (i.e., delimited by laws, policies, standards, accountability, management, and supervision) have remained stuck inside the hegemony of already developed quantitative and qualitative practices. Hence, we publish, but too frequently neither discover nor create.

How then might we capture the spirit of research methods as alive? The spirit of research methods goes beyond research tools such as statistics and coding (In Yvonna Lincoln’s *Organizational Theory and Inquiry* she quotes Ray Rists’ 1997 *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* as follows:

Not only does the use of one methodological approach as opposed to another change the means by which one perceives reality under study, but also the very reality to which the researcher has applied a method is itself continually in a state of change. . . Put differently, no methodology allows us to step twice in the same stream in the same place (p. 222)).

My operating principle is that theory drives methods and methods drive theory. More precisely, to liberate educational leadership from its stupor, we will have to disrupt our relationships with participants, scholarly journals, peer reviewers, and publishers. We need to build anew more equitable and socially just relationships throughout the research process. Participants need our respect, and the gatekeepers need to be more responsible for contributing to new knowledge rather than re-producing already existing Western knowledge (We might pay more careful attention to indigenous ways of knowing. For example, the Māori concept of *whanau* as described in *Decolonizing Methodologies* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith captures a new way of relating to participants:

Whanau is “a persistent way of living and organizing the social world. In terms of research, the *whanau* is one of several Māori concepts that have become part of a methodology, a way of organizing a research group, a way of incorporating ethical procedures that report back to the community, a way of ‘giving voice’ to the different sections of the Māori communities, and a way of debating ideas and issues that impact on the research project. (p. 189)).

The history of educational leadership relies upon dominant (i.e., Western) methodologies—with too few exceptions. Thus, our methods have become both prescriptive and formulaic, rather than descriptive and creatively synthetic, regardless of the intent of the methodologists-authors of the methods’ texts. Journal editors and peer reviewers demand to see one dominant format constituting academic scholarship. For example, I received this comment from a journal editor recently:

The revision is not related to the content of this section but to the format of the section. We will appreciate your efforts to make this section to be more compatible with a journal article.

We all know what “compatible with a journal article” means, but we do not know how being compatible relates to contributing to the knowledge base. Thus, the time is long overdue for educational leadership researchers to embrace methods creatively and critically to advance the field conceptually. Unless we are both intellectually curious and skeptical, I do not know how we can engage in the necessary struggles to bring research methods and theories into the 21st century. But unless we first own our complicity, I do not know how the field will proceed. And by complicit, I mean unreflective, ahistorical, and acontextual. The questions I pose are when, where, what, how, and why can we move from learning to do research to *researching to learn*?

3. My Methods as Methodic Doubts

In the following sections, I will trace my research journey, first as a novice researcher writing a dissertation in 1989 and then proceeding to uncover signposts, post hoc (i.e., they were in plain sight at the time, but I was neither able to see them nor to debate them). The signposts should have warned me/us not to proceed along this or that current pathway. But if those past/present specific moments are being lost—ignored, deleted, forgotten—to the field, then of what value is it to reveal new truths today?

In 2005/2011 in *A history of school leadership during its first century*, I wrote [6].

It is not a sign of good health for any academic field or discipline to have an untested, unexamined history, especially when that field is education.

How is it that we lose our histories? Is this a matter of methods and methodology? Maybe. But I also believe our field suffers from the inability to explicitly transition from (a) learning to research (which includes years of practicing research) to (b) researching to learn. While each of us travels our journeys, at some point, we should have arrived at point “b”. If not, then the field remains stuck, fixed, and predictable. One courageous scholar, not in educational leadership, but in educational sociology, the Lebanese scholar Dr. Adnan El Amine [7] documents in *The Production of the Void* (Arab) that research has been the victim of researchers borrowing ideas rather than thinking originally about ideas. He sees researchers as conformists because of political control and self-censorship. Cannot the same be said of Western educational research?

In such an atmosphere, research methods that are easier to implement and accomplish prevail, pushing aside the investigative method and replacing it with indoctrination. Thus, it would be difficult to “produce independent thinkers” in such environments, and social science research centers turn into marginal and ineffective ones [8].

If this trap has been set by the politics of education, then how have we self-censored ourselves? Off the top of my head, I think immediately of the processes of promotion and tenure, our tome-like curriculum vitae, and the many publications in peer-reviewed journals. How we can escape from the production of the void to research to learn, therefore, is the central purpose of this essay. In the next section, I will introduce the major signposts of my research journey, writing about each of the signposts beginning with the dissertation and moving to samples of convenience, the predictable failures of educational leadership reforms, the appropriation of old wine poured into new bottles as fads (e.g., turnaround school leadership), and the history of the standards’ movement in educational leadership.

4. A Typical Journey into the Void?

My journey, like all our journeys, starts with the writing of a dissertation as we all learn to do research. For me, the dissertation opened the door to academia and an assistant professorship at the University of New Orleans. At each of my career signposts, the lessons learned as part of my professional socialization needed to brew inside me before I was able to see how theory–methods interactions could transform educational leadership. The answers, of course, were always hiding in plain sight: choosing our audience, writing for the public, and being communicatively competent. While at each signpost in my career, I observed and learned new ideas, I nevertheless often failed to effectively and loudly speak out in opposition to the field’s helter-skelter reform efforts and dominant discourses. I knew

that what was happening was neither in the spirit of true ethical research in educational leadership nor in the best interests of our publics.

So why do I think that my words today will make any difference methodologically, structurally, or relationally? Our behaviors and our relationships with participants, journals, and publishers are so ingrained and taken for granted. Restructuring jeopardizes established reputations and challenges all that we have become good at: publishing in scholarly journals and writing texts. My writing by itself, like the conscience of Jiminy Cricket, is not likely to change minds or behaviors, including those of some peer reviewers. But I am reminded how individuals—like Dr. Amine above—can and should take a stand when they believe strongly that they are right. I am inspired by the life of Barbara McClintock, an American scientist who, while denied university tenure and who did not publish her works for two decades, continued to pursue her truths, which eventually were recognized by her being awarded a Noble Prize in 1983. I am also inspired by the unpublished speeches of the famous US statistician Donald Campbell [9], who came to believe that if we applied experimental research methods to intractable public problems such as poverty, then, over time and democratically, we could make changes in public policy for the public good.

I do not see this essay as a cautionary tale, but rather as a lever for radical changes in how and with whom we should conduct research publicly and democratically. That said, no one should go two decades without a publication, nor should we all wait until the last chapter of our careers to speak openly and honestly to our colleagues.

5. Understanding the Roots of Educational Leadership Research

Let us begin way back in 1910 with the survey movement to mark the origins of empirical research. This section is not meant to be an in-depth history of educational leadership research, but merely an outline of the parameters set by early researchers. This is necessary primarily because education researchers at any one particular point in time are indebted to those who came before. At the same time, I am inserting methodic doubts into the educational leadership conversations because researchers should not merely follow past practices methodologically, but rather invent new methods to fit their current studies of leadership. From 1910 to 1915, educational research focused on urban district school surveys, covering topics such as the conditions of facilities to school finances, teacher salaries, and student enrollment. The research objective was decidedly practical for use by school superintendents, principals, and teachers to improve practices and inform the public about educational progress [10].

The following years, 1916–1928, saw the beginnings of a shift away from school district- and superintendent-sponsored research to university-driven research and the pushback that it caused inside the research community. It was not only that the venue for conducting research changed, but so, too, did the topics of research. We can call this period a *coming-of-age* of our profession as professional educational researchers. As adolescents, researchers were exuberantly discovering and inventing the field, searching for a new professional identity. It was also at this time a struggle for status, particularly that of the university professor and for the school systems' roles of administration, supervision, management, and what we today call leadership. The notions of hierarchy and expertise emerged. More and more, the words and phrases “scientific study”, “efficiency”, and “standardized testing” became prominent. The building blocks for statistical measures and accountability were all in place by 1928. Each of these keyword markers reappears again and again up to the present. Methodic doubt, therefore, becomes an alert to question skeptically whether we are truly reforming educational leadership.

6. At the Start: The Dissertation

I can still remember my excitement when another envelope filled with a completed survey arrived in the mail—this was in 1988. I remember, too, teaching myself principal components analysis and enjoying how I was able to label the independent and significant factors within my dataset. For the most part, performing the quantitative analysis erased

some of the dissatisfaction I experienced interviewing school principals. It was not that the school principals were not being truthful; they were just being very cautious in answering my questions. This signaled one of many limitations in conducting educational leadership research with those close to power. Still, I soldiered on.

Whether the dissertation itself becomes a lifelong passion or a one-and-done exercise, something happens inside all of us; we become fascinated by the research process itself. Yet, over time, methodic doubt tempers that enthusiasm by engaging us in similar procedures governed prescriptively and formulaically: the same subheadings, the same number of words, and the process of peer review, revising, and resubmitting. It is a one-size-fits-all format, even as (1) we creativity come up with exciting new projects, and (2) we continue to learn and practice new research approaches and methods. All successful professors have mastered the expected academic rules necessary for journal editors and peer reviewers to shake their heads up and down as they habitually recognize the movements from section to section in the manuscript. We tolerate peer reviewers who genuinely offer their own preferred conceptual frameworks and theories, asking us to consider, revise, etc. And, if we are still learning to conduct research—or still practicing—we continue to rely on “the usual suspects”, those introduced to us in graduate programs to keep us in line methodologically. The imbalance between contributing to leadership theories versus not contributing to methods—or genres and formats—takes hold gradually.

7. Reliance on Convenience

The word “convenience” entered my life as a new Assistant Professor. At this point, I have to look at my curriculum vitae to remind myself what research I had conducted. It was that memorable! All of these studies were empirical, meaning that I first framed a problem, formulated a research question, identified a sample or group of participants, and collected data to analyze quantitatively and/or qualitatively.

By “convenience”, what I mean is that my teaching and service were all with aspiring school leaders and with beginning school principals. Being in the city of New Orleans gave me access to diverse contexts—urban, suburban, rural, public, private, and parochial. With a grant to train beginning principals in southeast Louisiana, I had access to numerous Parishes (i.e., school districts) and Archdioceses along with a historical southern tradition of private schools. So, from 1990 to 2000, I researched what was directly in front of my eyes: beginning principals, urban and suburban beginning principals, principals’ decision-making skills, school-based management, the relationship between the central offices and school building leaders, school governance, principal communications, school cultures, and school principal moral leadership. The studies were deemed worthy of my being promoted from Assistant to Associate Professor. I doubt they were worthy of much else. I was learning and practicing how to perform research and becoming more adept at publishing. That is, at the end of my first decade, I had mastered one specific set of research and writing skills.

8. New American Schools Reform

What I see when I look behind the curtains of the 1990s and 2000s are the power and influence of philanthropy (public–private partnerships), relentless competition, and the dominance of Research One universities worldwide. Over these two decades, the best and the brightest in educational leadership took the reins of government, foundations, and the academy. In other words, educational leadership had the right people in the right places then as they do today.

While still an assistant professor at the University of New Orleans (UNO), I was a close bystander of the New American School Reform movement in which prominent professors competed for public–private monies to change whole school districts. There was Stanford University’s Henry Levin and the Accelerated Schools Program. UNO—through a competitive grant with the Chevron Oil company—became a satellite center for Accelerated Schools, with Professor Levin flying in and out of New Orleans to offer training and

guidance in his program. While on the sidelines, I still wanted to be involved in the research and to learn as much as possible about Accelerated Schools. A training with Henry Levin was scheduled to be held at UNO; but when I tried to register, I was told that I would have to sign a non-disclosure form preventing me from using any of the lessons learned about Accelerated Schools. Even though I did not understand why this was necessary, I signed the form. At the training, I was thoroughly entertained by the showmanship of Professor Levin, who dressed in costume entered the room first as the “remediating” teacher and then as the transforming “accelerating” teacher.

Captivated, my interest quickly extended into the area of research, first studying reform districts that had adopted Accelerated Schools [11], and then a quantitative study comparing and contrasting all of the New American Reform movement programs across the US [12]. The well-known universities, programs and professors included The Coalition of Essential Schools (Brown University, TheodoreSizer), Success for All (reading) and Roots & Wings (mathematics) (Johns Hopkins University, Robert Slavin), as well as programs at Yale (James Comer) and the University of Virginia (E.D. Hirsch), and others. I had and still have tremendous respect for the careers of these individuals.

Of course, by now, I was aware of the politically competitive boundaries closing off these programs from one another. It was a deliberate and competitive model established by the federal government and fully supported by the designers. The obvious questions are what was learned and what were the educational leadership effects in the classroom? Empirically, our factor analysis of the New American School projects resulted in six latent factor variables with “reflecting on and questioning past and present practices” as explaining 37% of the variance. At the same time, we found that the national school reform models were not affecting the material conditions of teaching, learning, and administering as much as they were improving the within-school cultural conditions.

Of the many criticisms of New American Schools reforms, the two that stand out most are (a) the delay in conducting research, and (b) the lack of comparative data for learning from the many reform programs. This last criticism describes the lack of openness and cooperation among these elite professors and their programs for contributing to the knowledge base of educational leadership. Unfortunately, that is not a shared value within our profession, although some significant voices such as Joseph Murphy [13] reminded the field that without “connectedness”, we are not going to build a body of sustained research.

According to Jeffrey Mirel [14], another research observer of the New American Schools reform, the public–private reforms were driven by venture capitalists for education, looking for strategic investments to fund. Unfortunately, the US ended up with all of these wonderful stand-alone projects always in competition with one another. The work—and it was good work—stayed inside each project, remaining proprietary. This should have been a very important lesson learned; instead, it is now forgotten and lost to the history of our field. More importantly, the school and classroom reforms from these reform programs are also lost to the past.

9. Then Came Leadership Standards

Another signpost during this decade of reform was the state and national leadership standards movement. Those of us who were there at the beginning witnessed and participated in lively conference debates that were published in our scholarly journals. Today, leadership standards are taken for granted all around the world and are not subject to rigorous research. As established policy, leadership standards are rolled over from one legislative session to another without conducting research. There is no independent academic research, only in-house studies. The power of standards has been institutionalized such that new, original research to learn the effects, intended and unintended, in multiple contexts has ceased. We can see clearly how government policies have influenced educational leadership research.

Immediately after US national standards were developed, the Council of Chief State Officers, State Commissioners, Chancellors, and State Superintendents, set up a mechanism

to promulgate the standards in each of the 50 states. In Louisiana, I was hired as a consultant by the Louisiana Department of Education to convene monthly meetings with educators from all around the state. We would meet in Baton Rouge, the state capital, and engage in lively and productive conversations. At the end of the year, we presented the new Louisiana Principal Standards to the Department, our work being done. We were all extremely proud of what we had accomplished in one year.

But what happened next was not at all the outcome we had expected. Because of politics in the state legislature, the leadership standards stalled and remained in limbo. A whole year of hard work on the part of practicing district and school leaders was ignored and bypassed. Why? To say that it was politics is to say that the status of educators and educational leaders is not recognized as an important constituency. I decided that this was a research story that had to be told [15], but to what effect?

The story begins inside of educational leadership but ends quite differently. The US had created national standards that had to be assessed, and thus accountability systems were mandated throughout not only the US but internationally. It is instructive to quote directly from Peter Gronn [16]:

Standards for school leaders are central to the notion of performativity. . . . The significance of standards is that they provide a vehicle for those who steer systems to micromanage the day-to-day work of institutional personnel by seeking to ensure adherence and conformity to officially sanctioned codes of conduct. As such they embody detailed expectations of preferred (as opposed to best) (pp. 553–554).

Moreover, the power of the standards had become the new driver for school leadership preparation programs in universities. But what happened initially as an exciting new arena for research became almost overnight the mission of the professional association of doctoral programs, the University Council of Educational Administration. In other words, once again, an international research project had become subsumed within Ministries of Education around the world, and a different research agenda was created: designing and assessing leadership preparation programs. This policy called school leadership standards, in fact, became the tail that would wag the independent and autonomous research coming out to the pre-eminent doctoral degree educational leadership programs. And when funding was attached to this enterprise through the Wallace Foundation, well, it made the whole profession of educational leadership complicit in yet another government reform effort. According to Furman and English [17]:

In the end the ISLLC descriptors represent. . . a new kind of standardization, an attempt to *technologize* leadership, within an organizational context that has for too long been preoccupied with *efficiency* at the expense of social justice (Furman and English, 2002, p. 478).

10. Turnaround School Leadership: Taking a Step or Two Away from Education

Let me ask you a question: When did firing school principals and a third of their staff become an educational reform supported by empirical evidence? And yet, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) implemented just such a policy not research-based.

Removing ineffective tenured and untenured teachers and principals after they have had ample opportunities to improve, and ensuring that such decisions are made using rigorous standards and streamlined, transparent, and fair procedures. [18]

The policy called for principals to be replaced. But who were these laggards? Most were school leaders who had for years worked in the trenches of low-performing schools. They had dedicated their careers to serving low-income schools and communities, as did many of the teachers who year after year chose to teach inner-city students. Demographic research has been quite clear as to who these principals were/are: people of color.

Perhaps it was just a matter of time before the market objectives of venture capitalists who actually practiced turnaround leadership in the corporate world would become the dominant education reform strategy instead of educational leadership research. Again, the confluence of efficiency, standards, and accountability as established policy practices displaced research, both funded and unfunded. Paradoxically, a cottage industry of published books emerged on the topic of turnaround leadership in schools. And who would you guess were authoring such books? As we learned from the New American Schools Reform and from the Standards Movement, Research One professors had the access and resources to perform reviews of the literature and to repackage old wine in new turnaround bottles. As revealed in a previously published work [19], the authors revealed the research in quotation marks on turnaround school leadership.

In rapid succession, internationally known professors Michael Fullan, Joseph Murphy, Kenneth Leithwood, and Daniel Duke each had full-length books in print in short order. The names just mentioned are all in my academic family in terms of scholars whom I have relied on for knowledge. Yet, the fact is conducting research takes time; it is a tediously slow process from design to data collection and analysis. Yet, each of the turnaround authors quickly conducted secondary analyses of already collected data that have appeared in published research. They took that work and adapted it to the hot new reform topic. They used a blend of transformational and heroic leadership theories with business models of accountability and applied that to those low-performing schools that had achieved measures of success academically. Methodologically, the new narrative was filled with limitations and delimitations.

In 2006, Fullan offered ten turnaround leadership lessons in his new book titled *Turnaround Leadership* [20]. Fullan recycled the same familiar list of variables from moral purpose, high expectations, building capacity, restructuring roles, sharing knowledge laterally, learning as you go, building on productive conflicts, and establishing external partners—all change theory axioms previously published. What might be considered original to the concept of turnaround was Fullan's targeted investments and emphasis on district/system levels as the appropriate unit of analysis to be leveraged by system leaders for turnaround changes. As always, he argued persuasively that for turnaround leadership to work, it had to extend beyond short-term behavioral changes, especially those measured by annual test results on student achievement.

The following year, in 2007, Joseph Murphy co-authored (with Coby Meyers) *Turning Around Failing Schools: Leadership Lessons From the Organizational Sciences* [21]. Murphy viewed the turnaround processes in stages, and like Fullan, he, too, called for shifting emphasis to targeted resources. But unlike Fullan's model, Murphy's synthesis of literature [22] led him to his opposing the practices of mandating turnaround changes from afar, which even included the role of school district superintendents. Thus, both Fullan and Murphy adapted their previous frameworks to turnaround school leadership.

Kenneth Leithwood, both alone and with colleagues, and Daniel Duke, also alone and with colleagues, set out to re-analyze case study data they had collected over the past years on various leadership topics within their respective conceptual frameworks on expert, transformational leadership, and school improvement, respectively. Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, [23] and Leithwood [24] extracted "outlier districts" ($n = 31$) that were based initially on a series of studies from 2002 to 2005. Throughout the turnaround literature, the empirical cases often utilized previous data that were now repackaged under the new educator category named "turnaround". Like Fullan and Murphy before him, Leithwood supported targeting interventions toward the lowest-performing schools and their students. All four of these school improvement researchers cited here supported a needs-based approach to turnaround. Yet, even as Leithwood's finding connected student achievement and economic and social conditions, he retreated into the within-school variables of school improvement, stating:

... while student and family poverty is a part of the ‘presenting symptoms’ in the majority of underperforming districts and schools, it is also largely unalterable by their leaders... There is not much practical point in defining it as the cause of underperformance. If you did, you would be defining a problem you could not solve. [23]

Previously, in 2004, Duke [25] had conducted 15 case studies of elementary schools, out of which emerged his eight dimensions of change. From that database, Duke now concluded that turnaround had to be customized to fit the situation/context. As for the now proverbial “targeting”, Duke wrote of specificity concerning instruction, that is, additional learning time and expert help for struggling students, ongoing staff development based on student needs, and—at least in intent—intensified efforts to inform and engage parents and community members (p. 27).

Seven years later, Duke argued that turnaround must go beyond technical school-based changes—a finding confirmed by Mette and Scribner [26]. That is, successful implementation of turnaround efforts involves transforming the intentions of the turnaround school policy by supporting cultural changes that, in part, come from the school’s surrounding community. Thus, it is community involvement that extends turnaround school leadership beyond within-school variables or a coherent list of school improvement steps/stages. It is community involvement that helps educators confront the challenges of sustaining change beyond raising test scores in the short term (Duke & Landahl, 2011) [27].

My takeaway is simple: this was an enticing bandwagon that exemplified the cliché: old wine in new bottles. Each of the texts cited contained important school leadership insights worthy of publication; but, the outside packaging was not only deceptive, it was also not transformational.

11. Disrupters among the Best and the Brightest

The field of educational leadership has not confronted its low status among social science researchers. This status was inevitable, as the field became subservient to established policies, vested political interests, and external funders. I have suggested embracing methodic doubts, essentially melding methods with theories in educational leadership, so that researchers’ talents and insights might drive new directions. Being developers of theories while remaining consumers of methods, we delimited our abilities to move the field as a whole. I say as a whole because in piecemeal fashion, we have had researchers like Daniel Griffiths (i.e., practice over theory), T.B Greenfield (i.e., human values over science), Roland Barth (i.e., practice over expert knowledge), William Foster (i.e., human affairs over management theory), Edwin Bridges (i.e., problem as pedagogy over pre-packaged solutions), Richard Bates (i.e., social justice over narrow accountability outcomes), Jill Blackmore (i.e., feminist ideas as theory and method), among many others, who have conceptually carried the field forward.

In the last paragraphs, I will highlight another group of innovative researchers who have been practicing theory–methods interactions: Fenwick English and Linda Tillman. This list would be much longer if we looked beyond educational leadership into curricular inquiry and studied the writing of Maxine Greene, Paolo Freire, Elliot Eisner, Joe Kincheloe, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Dilys Schoorman—all of whom have integrated theories and methods.

In his prolific writings, English has explored postmodern conditions, drama, theatre, dance, biographies, and autobiographies as ways of knowing and developing leadership practices. Typical of his critiques is the following sentence in his infamous *Anatomy of Professional Practice* [28] (The text was an expansion of English’s UCEA Presidential Address in 2007. This would be his last appearance at UCEA as his analyses of the status of our so-called theories were not well received. As a field, we figuratively shot the messenger because he raised methodic doubts about almost everything we have been doing in research (and policies and practices).

Surveys of practice by practitioners may contain significant ideologies that go unquestioned and are passed off as the epitome of professionalism. It is possible, then, to enshrine bad practice in the process of upgrading it (p. 30).

Likewise, Tillman has moved seamlessly from Afro-centric leadership theories to her culturally sensitive research approaches. Neither English nor Tillman, however, fall into the category titled methodologist; however, they represent how more of us could embrace theory–methods interactions in the field of educational leadership.

12. Not the Last Words

Throughout the history of educational leadership, we have engaged in continuous, parallel, contradictory, and more than a few nonsensical conversations surrounding schools. But is it true that our continuing ignorance of education has outpaced our pursuits of truths (Wagner, 1993)? [29].

Throughout his career, William Foster warned us not to become seduced by the trappings of leadership or our proximity to power. With school reforms heavily linked to governmental power, foundations, and policies along with vested interests, our measured outcomes of research and practice have been reduced to comparing test scores, following standards and benchmarks, and whatever the next rubric holds. In this brief essay, I have tried to understand why and how we made so many wrong turns that were in plain sight.

Change is hard, especially when the challenge involves remaking the enterprise of conducting research into a collective endeavor instead of a private and privileged practice. But my methodic doubts—yours, too?—come only with question marks, not readymade or fully formed answers. If there are any lessons here to be learned, they are linked to traditional practices, for example, sprints for publishable results/answers instead of marathons asking important questions sequentially and in non-linear directions. My methodic doubts have led me today to hold tight to the methodologist inside each of us.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Foucault, M. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*; Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, USA, 1977.
2. Le, J.; Schmid, T. The Practice of Innovating Research Methods. *Organ. Res. Methods* **2022**, *25*, 94428120935498. [CrossRef]
3. Bogotch, I. What Our Research Methods Tell Us about Educational Leadership and More. . . In *Handbook of Leadership in Education*; Woods, P., Roberts, M.T.A., Young, H., Eds.; Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.: Cheltenham, UK, 2023.
4. Foster, W. *Paradigms and Promises*; Prometheus Books: Buffalo, NY, USA, 1986.
5. Greenfield, T.B.; Ribbins, P. *Greenfield on Educational Administration: Towards a Humane Science*; Routledge: London, UK, 1993.
6. Bogotch, I. A history of public school leadership: The first century, 1835–1942. In *The Sage Handbook of Educational Leadership*; English, F., Ed.; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2005/2010; pp. 7–33.
7. El Amine, A. *The Production of the Void: Arab Research Traditions*; Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc.: Beirut, Lebanon, 2021.
8. Haidar, F.B. In a Climate of Self-Censorship, Social Research Suffers. Available online: <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2021/04/in-a-climate-of-self-censorship-social-research-suffers/> (accessed on 21 April 2021).
9. Campbell, D. Methods for the Experimenting Society. *Eval. Pract.* **1991**, *12*, 223–260. [CrossRef]
10. Mershon, S.; Schlossman, S. Education, Science, and the Politics of Knowledge: The American Educational Research Association, 1915–1940. *Am. J. Educ.* **2008**, *114*, 307–340. [CrossRef]
11. Wonycott-Kytle, A.M.; Bogotch, I.E. Reculturing: Assumptions, beliefs, and values underlying the processes of restructuring. *J. Sch. Leadersh.* **1997**, *7*, 27–49. [CrossRef]
12. Wonycott-Kytle, A.M.; Bogotch, I.E. Measuring Reculturing in National Reform Models. *J. Sch. Leadersh.* **2000**, *10*, 131–157. [CrossRef]
13. Murphy, J. *Restructuring Schools: Capturing and Assessing the Phenomena*; Teachers College Press: New York, NY, USA, 1991.
14. Mirel, J. Unrequited Promise. *Educ. Next* **2002**, *2*. Available online: <https://www.educationnext.org/unrequited-promise/> (accessed on 21 April 2024).
15. Bogotch, I. ‘Enmeshed in the work’: The educative power of developing standards. *J. Sch. Leadersh.* **2002**, *12*, 503–525. [CrossRef]

16. Gronn, P. Designer leadership: The emerging global adoption of preparation standards. *J. Sch. Leadersh.* **2002**, *12*, 552–578. [CrossRef]
17. Furman, G.; English, F. Can Leadership be legislated? *J. Sch. Leadersh.* **2002**, *12*, 476–479. [CrossRef]
18. US Department of Education. Race to the Top Executive Report. 2009. Available online: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED557422.pdf> (accessed on 21 April 2024).
19. Bogotch, I.; Reyes-Guerra, D.; Freeland, J. Turnaround School Leadership: From Paradigms to Promises. In *Leadership in Diverse Learning Contexts*; Studies in Educational Leadership; Johnson, G., Dempster, N., Eds.; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2016; Volume 22.
20. Fullan, M. *Turnaround Leadership*; Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, USA, 2006.
21. Murphy, J.; Meyers, C.V. *Turning around Failing Schools: Leadership Lessons from the Organizational Sciences*; Corwin Press: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2008.
22. Murphy, J. Turning around failing organizations: Insights for educational leaders. *J. Educ. Chang.* **2008**, *11*, 157–176. [CrossRef]
23. Leithwood, K.; Harris, A.; Strauss, T. *Leading School Turnaround: How Successful Leaders Transform Low-Performing Schools*; John Wiley & Sons: San Francisco, CA, USA, 2010.
24. Leithwood, K. Turning around Underperforming School Systems: Guidelines for District Leaders. Paper Commissioned by the College of Alberta School Superintendents. 2008. Available online: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=98fa4088014c935913624391e9f491bee285dfe> (accessed on 21 April 2024).
25. Duke, D. *Keys to Sustaining Successful School Turnarounds*; Prepared by Public Impact: Charlottesville, VA, USA, 2004.
26. Mette, I.; Scribner, J. *Turnaround School Policy: A Lesson in the Transformation of Intentions*; UCEA: Denver, CO, USA, 2012.
27. Duke, D.; Landahl, M. Raising test scores was the easy part: A case study of the third year of school turnaround. *Int. Stud. Educ. Adm.* **2011**, *39*, 91–114.
28. English, F. *Anatomy of Professional Practice: Promising Research Perspectives on Educational Leadership*; Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, USA, 2008.
29. Wagner, J. Ignorance in Educational Research or, How Can You Not Know That? *Educ. Res.* **1993**, *22*, 15–23. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.