

Chapter 2

Turnaround School Leadership: From Paradigms to Promises

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Abstract *Turnaround School Leadership* is a contemporary term for a method of school reform and school improvement. It emerged in the US, circa 2004, as a new category of school leaders: individuals with the skills to turn around struggling or “low-performing” schools into “successful” schools. It is typically an attempt to blend both transformational and heroic leadership theories with business models of accountability. As a result, individual school leaders are held accountable for turning around schools by raising test scores. This definition is rooted in U.S. law (No Child Left Behind), U.S. policy (Race to the Top) and state and local governments’ political cultures. The authors of this chapter deconstruct the U.S. government’s definition as well as research-based definitions grounded in school improvement studies (e.g., Fullan, Murphy, Leithwood, and Duke). The authors argue that turning around schools should be a systemic educational idea grounded in social constructions of meaning based on curriculum inquiry (Reyes-Guerra and Bogotch 2011). The chapter describes the collaborative professional development model (PROPEL) of a university-school district partnership for developing turnaround school leaders. Central to the model is the use of program and course metaphors to help participants articulate effective answers regarding the purpose of U.S. public education in the twenty-first century.

Keywords Turnaround school leadership • School leaders • PROPEL • Collaborative professional development • U.S. public education • School improvement research • Low-performing schools • Educational leadership

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2.1 Introduction

In the United States, the profession of educational leadership serves two masters: (1) universities and non-profit organisations dedicated to school leadership development and the discovery of “best practices,” and (2) 50 state governments, specifically State Departments of Education, which have oversight responsibilities in certifying that university and district leadership development programs meet specific state-mandated criteria. This dual sovereignty model is a reflection of the historical uniqueness in U.S. governance, referred to as federalism. Federalism is the interplay of governmental powers across federal, state, and local levels which historically have been debated in education generation by generation (Bogotch 2011a).

Beginning in the 1990s, however, U.S. public education has undergone a radical change in governance. Local control and local determination of educational elements (e.g., curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and accountability) have been replaced by centralised controls similar to those exercised in unitary educational systems around the world. While many public policymakers view this 180-degree turn as a necessary step given the U.S.’s interpreted lacklustre standing on international test rankings, it does not change the fact that federal mandates such as Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994), the passage of the 2001 “No Child Left Behind” Act (NCLB), and the subsequent 2009 “Race to the Top” competitive grant program (RTTT), have exceeded federal constitutional authority in mandating the content and direction of public education (Reyes-Guerra 2012). Nevertheless, these laws and policies bookmark the current direction of public education in the era of accountability.

Public educators in the US work inside a system of standardisation: one that aligns curriculum to national and state standards, including Common Core benchmarks. Prescribed curriculum guides and pedagogical classroom practices utilise research-based “best practices,” purportedly applicable to all school environments. School leaders, teachers, and students are evaluated on their performance as measured by the results of annual standardised tests. This turn towards central authorities mandating and delivering curriculum, scripting lesson plans, and micromanaging school administration has reduced the degree of discretion within U.S. public schools and districts. School leaders deliver, align, coordinate, and monitor curriculum and instruction within today’s turnaround/accountability framework.

These assigned responsibilities are most evident within schools labelled as “failing” or in need of “turnaround.” The phrase “turnaround school leadership” is a targeted federal and state intervention under both the NCLB and RTTT. This chapter describes an innovative approach to turnaround school leadership. Specifically, it describes how a university-district partnership utilised insights from curriculum inquiry and social reconstructivism to systemically debate the educational meanings of turnaround school leadership within both professional development and school leadership preparation program contexts.

The innovative project described here is named the Principal Rapid Orientation and Preparation in Educational Leadership (PROPEL 2011–2014). PROPEL

received an award of \$3.5 million through June 2014 to reform and streamline school leadership preparation programs with the outcome of creating a single, seamless, leadership preparation continuum, from university to district practice. The program's primary objective is to build a university–school district state-of-the-art educational leadership partnership program to improve student achievement in schools of highest need. In its development, PROPEL seeks to involve university administrators and faculty and school district administrators at every level as a systemic policy and professional development effort aimed at holding every member of the two respective organisations accountable for transformative school improvement. It moves away from the punitive policies of mandates and away from models of turnaround that rely on the heroic efforts of individual school leaders to raise test scores. It further rejects the one-size-fits-all paradigmatic, already-developed packages of school improvement programs.

PROPEL, as a leadership development program, recruits and selects candidates for school leadership who are expected to lead high-needs schools. The project aims to build internal capacity of both university and district partners utilising instructional strategies of mentoring, coaching, apprenticeships, ongoing training, and workgroups for curricula inquiry (Reyes-Guerra and Bogotch 2011). Each of these instructional strategies are calibrated to state leadership standards and evaluated through implementation and outcome research projects. By leveraging the resources of the school district and university, aspiring school leaders will be prepared in instructional and “turnaround” school leadership by engaging in an internship (in Phase 1) and apprenticeship (in Phase 2) designed to immerse participants in the challenges of administrative practices, including but not limited to those targeting increasing teacher effectiveness and raising academic learning for all students. What that would mean in terms of reform is that the model of school leadership is one embedded in a turnaround environment (from curriculum development to professional development to community involvement). To accomplish this objective requires a repurposing of public education that extends beyond research-based findings in school improvement in order to fulfil the promises of democracy, social justice, and sustainable economic development.

2.2 From No Child Left Behind to Race to the Top

Under NCLB, those schools which did not meet their Adequate Yearly Progress based on standardised test results were given two remedies: (a) school choice, whereby parents could move their children from a failing school; and (b) intervention options, including school closure, school restart (e.g., to be reopened as charters), *school turnaround* (e.g., assigning new principals and reevaluating the teaching staff/rehiring no more than 50%), or school transformation (e.g., similar, though less restrictive, to the turnaround option). Under the third intervention option labelled “turnaround,” a school may implement a “new school model” based on a number of “research-based” policy initiatives.

Turnaround as a mandated reform is about replacing the school's leader and in some cases requiring all the school's faculty to resign or be reassigned to other locations before restaffing/rehiring procedures are established. Moreover, under NCLB, any school receiving a "failing" grade for 2 consecutive years was pressured to remove the school's principal as a precondition for state intervention – regardless of year-to-year student learning gains, community support, and/or the implementation of sustainable change initiatives. A majority of the states have recently expressed their unhappiness with these punitive mandates of NCLB. In fact, as of this writing, 33 out of 50 states in the US, including the District of Columbia, have been granted waivers from NCLB under the provisions guiding President Obama's Race to the Top. Although NCLB has not been abolished, the Obama administration developed a federal program to influence change as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Using federal stimulus dollars (\$4.35 billion), the Act created competitive RTTT grants for education reform based on innovative strategies that were considered most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness. One such initiative was the turning around of the lowest-achieving schools.

2.3 Educational Leadership Research and Practice: The Emergence of Turnaround School Leadership

In 2004, the State of Virginia contracted with the University of Virginia (UVA) to create a Turnaround Specialist certificate made possible by a \$3 million gift from the Microsoft Corporation (Archer 2005). Then Governor Mark Warner developed the Education for a Lifetime Initiative, leading to the contract of the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education to create the UVA School Turnaround Specialist program as a collaborative effort between the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration and the Curry School of Education. The program was developed around the idea of best practices of both business and education, including the following changes: leadership styles, organisational policy, programs offered, organisational processes and procedures, personnel and staffing, instructional practices, community involvement, and facilities (Rhim et al. 2008, cited in Mette and Scribner 2012, p. 7).

This 2004 challenge was meant to turn around "chronically underperforming schools by creating an entirely new category of educators: an individual with the training and the tools to come into a struggling school and try to turn it around" (Fairchild and DeMary 2011, p. ix). Almost overnight, turnaround school leadership became the new educational leadership reform *du jour* (Webster 2012). Notwithstanding the dismal record of school reforms in high-needs schools, there was now no hesitation on the part of educational policymakers, consultants, and researchers to present comprehensive and coherent checklist-driven models (see

Papa and English 2011, for a critique of checklists) applied to this new category of educational leadership. In fact, some of the models for turnaround school leadership emerged already developed and functional as if the evidence presented on successful turnaround efforts was conclusive.

What the models had in common was their school improvement principles, such as: the “new” educational turnaround leader needs to shift from management-centred leadership to instructional leadership; vision and the elements of transformational leadership must be used by all school leaders; the school itself needs to be restructured to allow for new configurations of time and organisation to allow for development of human capacity; professional learning communities need to be created, modelled, and led; data need to be collected and analysed to drive change and instruction; leadership needs to be distributed; and quick successes must be gained to demonstrate that the ship had been righted. That these action plans previously offered in multiple combinations had not resulted in successfully turning low-performing schools around in the past did not give pause to its proponents that turnaround might require different educational reform ideas. Instead, the turnaround initiatives gave proponents another opportunity to rearticulate their school reform and school improvement ideas. Previously published, coherent school improvement checklists were now promoted as comprehensive turnaround school leadership models.

PROPEL researchers reviewed school turnaround literatures, focusing on four leading educational leadership researchers: Michael Fullan, Joseph Murphy, Kenneth Leithwood, and Daniel Duke. From an historical perspective, the dominant paradigms relating to turnaround went from planned change (Bennis et al. 1985), implementation processes (Berman and McLaughlin 1978; Fullan 1982), school effectiveness (Edmonds 1979) to school improvement. Fullan originally viewed change from two perspectives, staff development (1982) and organisational development (with Fullan and Pomfret 1977), concluding that change itself was both contextual to practices and contextual as education. From these early on-the-ground empirical studies, Fullan further identified tensions and contradictions in terms of “change forces,” not unlike the force field analysis of driving and restraining forces developed by Kurt Lewin (1951). Fullan then formulated practical and dispositional strategies in terms of “moral purposes” and ethical decision making as to what was worth fighting for. For the past three decades, his writings have influenced global educational reforms on both large and small scales.

By 2006, 2 years after the term *turnaround leadership* had entered education, Fullan offered 10 turnaround leadership lessons in a book titled *Turnaround Leadership*. Not surprisingly, the variables of moral purpose, high expectations, building capacity, restructuring roles, rules and relationships, sharing knowledge laterally, learning as you go, allowing for productive conflicts, and establishing external partners, all well-established school improvement leverage points, reappeared in Fullan’s *turnaround* recommendations. Highlighting works by Hargreaves, Fink, Kantor, Mintrop, Elmore, and others including Fullan’s own works, turnaround school leadership emerged from this non-exhaustive review of literature. More emphasis, however, was now given to investing money in targeted reforms as

well as in district/system levels as the appropriate unit of analysis to be leveraged by system leaders for turnaround changes. These emphases, it seems, were meant to address persistent problems related to the final stages of institutionalism and sustainability. For turnaround to work, it had to extend beyond short-term behavioural changes, especially those measured by annual test results on student achievement.

The following year, in 2008, Joseph Murphy coauthored (with Meyers) *Turning Around Failing Schools: Leadership Lessons From the Organizational Sciences*. The book applied lessons learned from businesses and non-profits to K-12 education, asking why certain organisations declined and how they reversed the processes and outcomes. Murphy is well known within school improvement communities for his work in developing national leadership standards, his scholarship on leadership preparation, and his editorial works with the American Educational Research Association's *Handbook of Research on Education Administration* (1999) and the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE) yearbook titled *The Educational Leadership Challenge* (2002). Like Fullan, Murphy viewed turnaround processes in stages. At the same time, Murphy recognised that most conceptions and practices of turnaround involved the personnel action of changing/replacing the school's leadership. And also like Fullan, he called for a shift and emphasis to targeted resources. In his model, resources were targeted to those most in need (whether students, teachers, or parents) and those trying to make a difference in classrooms and in the community. In pragmatic terms, this meant distinguishing between those in school who are motivated to making a difference from those who are not. The former need turnaround support while the latter ought to be replaced. That said, Murphy's synthesis of literatures led to his opposition to practices of mandating turnaround changes from afar, which may even include district superintendents. In other words, it is important to support the needs of schools over externally motivated political change agendas. In reality, however, personnel decisions fall under the job descriptions of district superintendents, creating structural conflicts for implementing any systemic change in school districts.

Whereas both Fullan and Murphy came to the topic of turnaround through syntheses of literatures revolving around the stages of change from failure to recovery to success, two other prominent educational leadership researchers analysed previously conducted school and system studies applicable to turnaround school recommendations. Kenneth Leithwood (alone and with colleagues) and Daniel Duke (alone and with colleagues) set out to analyse case study data they had collected over the years on various leadership topics within their respective conceptual frameworks on expert and transformational leadership and school improvement, respectively. In Leithwood (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2010), the focus was on case studies of "outlier districts" ($n=31$) which were based initially on a series of studies from 2002 to 2005. Throughout the turnaround literature, the empirical cases often utilised previous data repackaged under the new educator category named "turnaround." In outlier cases, the researcher is able to capture the dynamics of transiting from failure to success and then, using multiple cases, converge on the prominent themes.

Leithwood approached turnaround methodically, beginning with a careful diagnosis of the problems and then proposing the following steps: clarity and moral weight of the leadership team's vision for students, followed by the responsibility of the team to make that vision transparent, logical, and worthy of support. Once this step was established, it was important that the vision be communicated frequently and with a plan that has a sense of urgency to all the members of the school's community. Leithwood, too, supported targeting interventions toward the lowest performing schools and their students. Thus, those in most need should receive a higher share of the resources. In fact, all four school improvement researchers cited here support a needs-based approach to turnaround. However, not all turnaround school reformers support the redistribution of resources based on principles of equity according to the needs of students and teachers in lowperforming schools – particularly those turnaround efforts that promote and highlight competitive models of school improvement. That said, the PROPEL designers were cognisant of competition for dollars as well as students, a reality that all turnaround school leaders need to address.

Leithwood asserts that best evidence data, closely monitored, should be used to determine outcomes relevant to the next stages of school improvement. Unfortunately, this is acknowledged as a major limitation in the turnaround leadership literature. Leithwood concluded that at present there is only limited evidence, indicating that any turnaround leadership findings should be viewed as suggestions, not as prescriptions or definitive solutions. Leithwood further concluded that turnaround was not a single issue or single problem, but rather an umbrella of issues based on socio-cultural issues of poverty's effect on student achievement. Yet even as Leithwood made this connection between student achievement and economic and social conditions, he retreated into the within-school variables of school improvement, that is, labelling student and family poverty as "presenting symptoms" in underperforming districts and schools, and which he asserted were not practical for school leaders to address.

It was precisely on this sociocultural issue that the curriculum designers in PROPEL turned toward the relationship between critical urban problems of poverty and student achievement while still open to any and all valid "suggestions" from the school improvement research.

The fourth prominent educational leadership researcher highlighted here is Daniel Duke from the University of Virginia. Given the origins of turnaround within the 50 states, the location of the University of Virginia made it a logical place to advance the nationwide study of turnaround. The university's business and education colleges collaborated to form a centre for the study of turnaround leadership in different settings.

In 2004, Duke conducted 15 case studies of elementary schools that led him to propose eight dimensions of change: Leadership, School policy, Programs, Organisational processes, Staffing, Classroom practices, Parent and Community involvement, and School facilities. These eight were then divided into three clusters: (a) eliminating barriers, (b) creating support for teaching and learning, and (c) improving instruction. As with each of the previous leadership researchers, Duke

offered a comprehensive approach in the sense that all eight dimensions had to be present. At the same time, Duke held that turnaround had to be customised to fit the situation/context. In other words, there had to be room for adapting context and culture within the list of turnaround essentials.

The list of turnaround essentials derived from case study data begins with the school engaged in developing an agreed focus (what others call vision) that lists the school members' core values: a belief that all children can learn; a commitment to distributed leadership; teamwork and data-driven decision making; transparency of the data; continuous monitoring of the instructional focus and students' progress; and a focus on shared responsibility and student success, particularly with respect to literacy. The specificity extends to instruction. Duke (2008) calls for 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).

Duke argues that turnaround must go beyond technical school-based changes – a finding confirmed by Mette and Scribner (2012). That is, successful implementation of turnaround efforts involves transforming the intentions of turnaround school policy by supporting cultural changes which 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 to confront the challenges of sustaining change beyond raising tests scores in the short term (Duke and Landahl 2011).

2.4 Turnaround School Leadership as More than School Improvement

There is much to learn from the decades of school effectiveness and school improvement research. Many low-performing schools have engaged in school improvement efforts with notable results (Acker-Hocevar et al. 2012; Jacobson and Bezzina 2008). So it is not surprising that “turnaround school leadership” should incorporate many of the steps/stages of school improvement, but with a new sense of urgency to bring about rapid, yet sustainable change.

The works of Fullan, Murphy, Leithwood, and Duke present researchers with two methodological approaches: the first as synthesis (i.e., meta-analyses of literatures) and the second as analyses (i.e., of data, primarily case studies). We conclude that we know how to transform chronically low-performing schools, maybe (Barbour et al. 2010, p. 3). The maybe, of course, has to do with the fact that the coherent and comprehensive models of turnaround are all works in progress (Duke and Landahl 2011; Mette and Scribner 2012). Federal and state laws and policies regarding the replacement of school leaders and the restaffing of schools are starting points (Murphy 2006). More fundamental reforms shift the unit of analysis from

individual school leaders and from individual schools to systems such as districts and State Departments of Education. The most controversial and difficult aspect of systemic change has to do with how to bring socio-cultural-economic and political variables beginning with local neighbourhoods into the school improvement analysis. If turning around the school is only a starting point for systemic change, then turnaround school leadership involves turnaround community, turnaround district, turnaround state, and turnaround national educational system. This broader systemic construct requires that researchers address the situational needs of children and their families in order to demonstrate that public schools care about “social justice, health and well-being, and economic development” (Fullan 2006, p. 6).

This sociocultural interaction was dramatically illustrated in the Wallace Foundation documentary titled *The Principal Story* (Lending and Mrazek 2009). In one scene, Principal Tresa Dunbar is visited by the district’s instructional leadership team. The principal expresses her opinion as to what the school improvement practice of “walk-throughs” by this team should look for:

I’d like a walkthrough of the classrooms to see how many kids have fathers, to see how many kids have parents who are incarcerated and who are angry – how many children don’t care about putting a word on the word wall because they haven’t seen their mother in three days or three weeks. I’d like to do a walkthrough about why we don’t have any social workers, why I have a part-time social worker, why I just have one counselor, one case manager. It’s not that instruction isn’t important – it is.... We have to start looking at what schools are being held accountable for.

Even the non-educator filmmakers themselves concluded that not only should the public see what turnaround school leadership looks like in low-performing schools, but so, too, should district administrators. If that was clearly evident to these non-educators, then it is clear that turnaround must shift its unit of analysis from the school to the larger systems (Fullan 2006).

Similarly, in one of the many case studies presented in *The turnaround mindset* by Fairchild and DeMary (2011), we read the following:

Principal Wallin had few disagreements with her Local Instructional Superintendent, but early on they diverged on whether to write up one underperforming teacher’s lesson as unsatisfactory.... Wallin sensed this decision might have reverberations well beyond this one staff member. ... “I knew that writing up that teacher at that time would have had a negative backlash and would stop some of the momentum I had,” Wallin explained. (p. 150)

While the school improvement literature identifies the need to target support and resources, the issues of turnaround revolve around the tensions between schools and external authorities including school districts, school superintendents, and state and federal educational agencies. The focus and timing of contextual decisions are matters of school climate and culture which cannot be written into laws and policies. That said, there is not sufficient space in laws and policies to give school leaders the room to negotiate compromises. There cannot be checklists, recipes, or formulae for successfully turning schools around. For researchers to recognise this and call for customised turnaround adjustments, however, begs the question of how district, state, and federal authorities view the implementation of turnaround essentials.

Table 2.1 Turnaround as policies versus educational ideas

Educational policies	Educational ideas with citations
Externally driven	Internal locus of control (Anderson et al. 2005)
Checklists, lessons, essentials	Socially re-constructed (Kemmis 1980)
Mandates with sanctions	Professional judgments (Bogotch and Taylor 1993)
Heroes/heroines	Systemic responsibilities (Biesta 2004)
System agenda & compliance	Needs of teachers, students & communities (Murphy 2010)
Curriculum aligned, coordinated & monitored	Curriculum inquiry: complicated conversations (Pinar 2004, 2006)

The point is that school improvement and turnaround school leadership researchers agree on the need for systemic reforms at the district level. Case studies describe in detail what these reforms look like in practice and how they might be supported by external authorities. But what are left out of the comprehensive models are two ends of a continuum: beyond-school variables of sociocultural conditions and how external authorities develop the capacity to embrace within-school teaching and learning dynamics. This, of course, leaves turnaround research findings in an untenable situation for they ignore both school improvement findings from Roland Barth's (1991) *Improving schools from within* and other case studies which do not specify how expert external advisors can "mutually adapt" to within-school climate, and culture variables – the fundamental systemic issues raised by the Rand Change Agent Studies (Berman and McLaughlin 1978), research conducted two plus decades before the phrase turnaround school leadership appeared in 2004. The dichotomy of externally driven turnaround mandates and turnaround educational ideas is represented in Table 2.1.

The realities of the era of accountability are that complying with policy mandates requires school leaders and teachers to align, coordinate, and monitor with fidelity and not adapt policy, leadership, curriculum, or instruction to diverse contexts. In complying, educators spend a disproportionate amount of the time and space within the school day filling out reports, which diverts attention from planning programs and meeting with children and their families. The two protagonists in *The Principal Story* were shown going home to empty apartments and continuing their paperwork and phone calling/texting well into the night. That is what school systems require of their turnaround school principals. This model is neither attractive (to recruiting future school leaders) nor is it sustainable. Principals and teachers (and thus students) are kept busy by the demands of accountability, which may or may not be educative (Apple 1986; Dewey 1938/1997; McNeill 1988). The comprehensive models, with accompanying checklists, keep getting longer as new variables are identified and new combinations of variables are recommended – all as suggestions, not as conclusions. Is there an alternative for researchers in the educational ideas along the lines of those listed in column 2 in Table 2.1?

2.5 PROPEL: Alternative Interventions

The limitations of school improvement methods and findings with respect to both units of analysis and sociocultural, economic, and political variables may be viewed in terms of the paradigm's blank and blind spots (Heck and Hallinger 1999; Thompson 2012; Wagner 1993). Relevant to the discussion on turnaround, Thompson notes that in blind spots, "a small number of case studies may allow you to build really rich descriptions but do not allow you to generalise to scale" (n.p.). Blank spots are issues not yet revealed by the data, but that may become known through further research. It is this chase after variables of interest – and their combinations/emphases – that characterises school improvement research. School leadership and change is so complex that there will always be blank spots and thus no end to the number of possible studies on a given school improvement topic. The best we can hope for from research, then, are partial answers (Bogotch and Roy 1997). That is, research-based models of turnaround school leadership are delimited conceptually by school improvement findings which focus on the *how* of turnaround rather than the *why* of turnaround – which would require different kinds of leadership conversations. Instead of the search for blank spots, we should ask questions about what we don't know and begin the search for blind spots. School improvement checklists communicated as necessary and sufficient for turnaround school leadership take us just so far. What about the larger sociocultural, ethical, and political purposes of public education? The categorical mistake of school improvement is to substitute organisational coherence for systemic changes that are genuinely comprehensive. The question we ask is how to break cleanly from coherent, empirically-based conceptual frameworks. This has meant a careful interpolation of the lessons of school improvement that connect with the practices of democratic curriculum inquiry, transformative leadership, as well as with issues of social justice based on the needs of children within schools.

PROPEL, therefore, can be viewed as a deliberate beginning, again with the understanding that the local context, its rules and regulations, the local culture, the district way, and the need to develop skills and dispositions for individual and systems had to be rethought. Such rethinking should be focused on the moral purposes of public education – democracy and social justice in urban settings. The work would take place explicitly within the developmental processes of curriculum inquiry (Reyes-Guerra and Bogotch 2011). Turning around schools, we argue, is more about how a society, generation by generation, confronts the role of public education in a democracy than it is about school improvement as an end-in-itself. Turning around schools is a matter for the public to hold its government accountable for policies regarding the funding of public education as a whole, rather than a focus on "failing" schools. Not only must curriculum and leadership be redesigned as a whole-school approach programmatically, but the whole child, the whole person, not just cognitive learning gains, would have to be included in the assessment measures. The work, therefore, would be systemic and focus on growth and development. PROPEL seeks to transform curriculum into inquiry as ideas to be debated

and then (re)constructed. At the core, educational leadership is about the moral and political purposes of education. The work, however, would be driven by the needs of students and adults as well as children.

Unless we link turnaround school leadership to a national commitment to addressing poverty and its relationship to low-performing schools, we will maintain the student achievement gaps that are sociocultural and that reflect disparities in socioeconomic status.

2.6 The Turnaround PROPEL School Leader

The underlying principles of curricular inquiry connect to turnaround school leadership. The very acts of curricular inquiry mean that what a leader does is determined by moral purposes and human contingencies, not dictates from external authorities. The leadership is a matter of both discovery and collective actions and shared responsibilities. It involves surfacing struggles, conflicts, and tensions. It is what makes living in a democracy messy; it is what makes leading a public school complex. The first steps address constructing a leadership curriculum for aspiring leaders and system administrators that aligns curricular activities with school district personnel (Davis et al. 2005; Hess and Kelly 2005). Several national reports have suggested that school districts and departments of educational leadership design a district-specific curriculum collaboratively, coteach coursework, and share the supervision and evaluation of participants (Fry et al. 2006; Hess 2003; Knapp et al. 2003; Leithwood et al. 1999). With a university-district partnership in hand, PROPEL has focused on three objectives for turnaround school leadership:

1. develop systemic reform that will enable sustainable learning growth;
2. create a contextual and critical analysis of current organisational performance that guides plans of action for reform; and
3. build a school and district culture that is founded on democratic goals, community improvement, and sustainable leadership.

While the initial emphasis was on low-performing schools, PROPEL training has broadened the notion of turnaround to all schools, regardless of their state letter grades and rankings, because all have areas of instruction and curriculum in need of turnaround.

2.7 Emerging Metaphors as Promises, Not Paradigms

Having reviewed the literature on school turnaround, it was clear that no one school improvement model, however comprehensive, would or could suffice. Likewise, no federal, state, or district policy encompasses the multiple contexts within and across U.S. public schools and communities. Moreover, decades of continuous educational

reforms have conditioned educators to repackage whatever their current practices are so as to fit new leadership standards (Bogotch 2002) and curricular benchmarks. The first author of this chapter used a series of metaphors to engage district and university participants in conversations, complicated conversations according to Pinar (2008), that were meant to describe, question, critique, and reflect on possibilities for change. The purpose was for participants themselves to engage in believing they could make changes in their practices and in the system's practices (i.e., rules and structures) (Reyes-Guerra and Bogotch 2011). Only then, we believe, would the meanings of turnaround become relevant to teachers and principals.

The metaphors we adopted were shortcuts to jumping over excuses, structural and cultural barriers, and habits of the mind. The objective was the same as in qualitative research: to make the familiar strange. The three metaphors described in this chapter were introduced in three curriculum workgroups created to redesign a leadership preparation program, course by course. The three metaphors to emerge were (a) falling (back) in love with public education, (b) experiencing the changing seasons of managing public schools, and (c) learning leadership dance steps. Ehrich and English (2012) in citing Scheffler (1978, p. 47) noted that "Metaphorical statements often express significant and surprising truths, unlike stipulations which express no truths at all, and unlike descriptive definitions, which normally fail to surprise." For Ehrich and English, metaphors used in leadership development could:

1. make space for alternative metaphors in leadership preparation programs;
2. provide opportunities to students of leadership to understand through alternative learning approaches, and
3. provide opportunities for engagement in alternative research agendas.

In the PROPEL partnership, it was particularly important for university professors not to romanticise any aspect of school leadership content, be it definitions of leadership or community (i.e., when communities may be dysfunctional) or parenting, but rather to ground conversations in the perceived realities of district practitioners before attempting to expand imagined possibilities beyond their perceptions. It was also important for all participants to acknowledge that words, literally or figuratively, could not eradicate poverty or minimise socio-political-cultural disparities. However, one intended purpose of PROPEL was to free participants' minds from stereotypes and old ideas that have acted as barriers to changing the lives of students in and out of schools. It was precisely these habits of mind that had limited school improvement researchers during implementation stages.

Thus, PROPEL sought to tap into the participants' imaginations so as to bring forth participants' own ideas for changing public schooling. To do so meant affirming what was functional, pragmatic, and competent and then demanding that participants go beyond and outside the everyday routines and assumptions which perpetuate school system structures and status quo hierarchical relationships (Bogotch 2010). Thus, together, university and district partners engaged in constructivist conversations that opened up the possibilities for thinking about their work in terms of new roles and new ideas for systemic change. We would, if successful, "jump together" (Gould 2003) into new territories of the mind.

2.7.1 *Metaphor 1: Falling (Back) in Love with Public Education*

The uniqueness of federalism referred to in the opening paragraphs highlights complexities, tensions, and struggles over single solutions for policy and school improvement models. The U.S. system has had this notion for well over two centuries as each generation has had to renegotiate how it would construct public education and for what purposes. For example, during the era of Eastern European immigration, Americanisation and settlement were two of the primary purposes of public education, particularly in cities. During both world wars of the previous century, schools offered needed support services for troops abroad and industries at home. Public schools have been and continue to be the battlegrounds for civil rights and desegregation. In other words, U.S. public schools have been at the forefront of social, political, and economic developments throughout the nation's history (Bogotch 2005/2010). In that sense, we believe that there is much to love about the purposes and good works of public education.

Whether that reality is true today is up to today's generation. Clearly, in this era of accountability, standardised test scores have become the dominant discourse for determining the success of school reforms. While there may have been much to love in the diversity of public education historically, it is up to today's educators to identify what is worth loving in public schools. The metaphor of *falling (back) in love* with the promises of public education as a fundamental right for all became the persistent theme, first of curriculum conversations and then of instructional practices. What makes this metaphor problematic, however, was that since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a slow and steady progression towards centralised authorities controlling education, first in order to create equity and fairness, but then to standardise all aspects of the school day/year. As such, the public is becoming more and more disenchanted with the governance of public education and is seeking out alternative (i.e., more lovable) reforms (e.g., magnets, charters, home schooling, virtual education) that are perceived to be closer to their community values (i.e., U.S. values and beliefs). We knew that these alternatives were succeeding from our own experiences:

Today I visited 9 charter schools. One of them had over 1,200 students on their first day of school. In total, charters increased student numbers by approximately 4,000 and this is only day one. Overall, about 33,000 students attend charter schools in [name of district]. Why are parents "falling in love" with charters?

In *falling in love*, PROPEL insisted that educators confront the politics of education through the lens of U.S. history and the U.S. Constitution. The metaphor was introduced in the Governance course as the foundation for connecting school leadership with citizenship (i.e., citizen leaders). We believed that it was important for PROPEL participants to learn or remember the history of public education and the many struggles against authoritarian practices that educators such as Horace Mann and Ella Flagg Young fought. We wanted PROPEL participants to understand that for turnaround school leadership to be successful, it was up to them to replace fear

with promises, replace frustration with hope, and replace ignorance with knowledge for children and adults.

The Governance curriculum workgroup asked aspiring leaders to return to their youth, their initial decisions to become educators, and their earliest desires to make a difference. Through this discussion, we established the conditions for participants to combine this self-knowledge with their knowledge of U.S. history, particularly as it related to understanding governance structures, leadership visions, and citizens' values and the purposes of public education. By starting the Governance class with the history of education, discussing controversies and inequities, describing social justice issues, ethics, and the purpose of public education, we were able to bring to the forefront why public education is necessary to a democracy and why it needs to benefit all citizens. Turnaround school leaders must be willing to challenge the status quo by bringing their passion and skills forward to facilitate school change.

One administrator/PROPEL adjunct said:

I love the idea of “falling back in love with education” even though many of the students weren't old enough to fall out of love and get jaded. Education has a weak reputation and it's time we changed that. From teaching school law for many years I knew that students didn't have a foundation for case law and the workings of the judicial systems. They don't even remember rudimentary civics in many cases, so the way this course is structured beginning with the history of education, was a great start.

The intent of the course was to reconnect these decisions, emotions, and passions to the governance of schools so that participants see it as more than checks and balances, separation of powers, laws and legal theories, and fear of lawsuits; and they think about the role of education in a democratic society not just as platitudes but as real possibilities through a knowledge of important issues (and social injustices), advocacy and voice for others, and turnaround leadership.

In reviewing PROPEL participant feedback at the end of the Governance course, the authors looked specifically for how the word *love* was used. Our finding was that the word was not used at all! Why? Love has always been important to education (Freire 1970/2000) even when it is unspoken or unrequited. Our data fell into three distinct categories: (a) *emotions* such as passion, enjoyment, appreciation, beneficial, and inspiring; (b) *politics* such as “getting involved, need to be more political”; “a term I usually cringe at”; “vocabularies of corruption and injustices in an education course”; “[a realisation] that I should become more knowledgeable in educational government”; and “unwrapping political documents like the Constitution helped candidates in the program have a more informed view of how education was designed in a manner that would allow control by state power”; and (c) *new meanings of turnaround* such as “pivotal in my quest to advocate for what is right for our children and their families.... I can be a better leader and a better citizen. (citizen-leader)”; “course provided a space to ‘reflect’ on”; “people who have an interest in improving education but not public education are creating policies”; and “Putting aside our differences and do what is best for the common good.”

PROPEL participants were given the “opportunity to really delve into serious discussions intended to deepen knowledge and make these (governance) issues meaningful and relevant.” The data indicate a lack of content knowledge as well as

the limited perspectives that those aspiring to be educational leaders have. For the past decade or more, social, political, and cultural foundations have been removed systematically from teacher and leadership preparation programs in favour of technical competencies, as if the latter provides the right training for tomorrow's educators. Today's accountability leadership, restricted and delivered curriculum, and direct, didactic methods of instruction all represent a myopic notion of how to turn around schools and communities. That said, a single course is inadequate for school reform. We turn now to the second metaphor of management.

2.7.2 Metaphor 2: Seasons, as in the Seasons of Managing a School

While the cliché holds that the only constant is that things change, for school principals, the one constant that survives eras, reforms, and political agenda is the management of schooling. There is a finite list of managerial functions that must be learned by everyone who sits behind a desk in schools. Even as school administrators pay lip service to instructional leadership, they talk about how managerial tasks keep them from focusing on classroom instruction. Although some administrators are better than others, managerial competency is more than a matter of technical skills. Understanding managerial operations allows school administrators to infuse educational ideas and objectives into this work. The higher level skill is to see how many discrete tasks are connected and move to positions of priority at different times of the school year.

The metaphor of the seasons of schooling evolved from the traditions of public schools. Most, if not all, public schools follow a well-worn path. From the perspective of the student and teacher, the circadian rhythms of the school year are familiar, consistent, and predictable. Beginning with the first day of school, the excitement of new beginnings, new teacher, new books, and new classmates pervades the school. As the newness fades, the focus on daily lessons, assessments, and extracurricular activities rises. This focus swiftly flows into winter break, then the second semester. In today's context of high-stakes accountability, the spring becomes "testing" season. As the school year approaches the final days, traditions of graduations, passing a grade, and anticipation of the summer break take hold. While many schools and districts provide a variety of summer learning opportunities, summer vacation remains a formidable tradition.

The curriculum workgroup used this familiar progression of the school year as an organisational structure for the course, with a major twist. The curriculum workgroup wanted the participants to see the year from a new perspective, that of the turnaround principal. The questions we asked were: What was the role of the principal to ensure that the school operated smoothly? What actions did the principal take to plan and implement? Who was involved? When did those actions occur?

The idea of two dimensions also emerged as a metaphor for the course. The work group emphasised the concept that while the turnaround principal operated on a daily basis in one dimension, there were also actions that occurred in a second dimension as preparation for the seasons to come. The challenge was to change the perspective from that of a student and teacher operating in the day to day, to one of the leader who has to predict, prepare, and plan for the future while attending to the now.

The objective in managing school operations was for PROPEL participants to see the “organisation” inside budgeting, personnel, safety, facilities and maintenance, school activities, and technology. Instead of teaching these skills in units, every session with PROPEL participants focused on what needed to be accomplished week by week, month by month, and season by season. Thus, the tasks listed above were taught and retaught in the context of their significance throughout the whole year. By understanding management organisationally as seasons, then the notions of crises or emergencies are put into perspective because good managers have already planned for multiple contingencies (by week, month, semester). They are prepared mentally and skillfully find the time and space within discrete tasks.

Through the metaphor of seasons, every task was viewed as year round with different emphases season by season. For example, what does a school administrator have to know and do in school budgeting during the fall as opposed to during spring or summer? Similarly, what are the different personnel functions throughout the year? When is hiring, when are evaluations? And, perhaps, even more importantly, how do managerial tasks relate to big ideas of leadership such as vision, school mission, reflecting on values, and setting priorities?

The latter matters provide school leaders with a moral compass which is often needed when complex human issues require professional judgments. Big ideas such as vision and goals support school leaders, for example, when having to make personnel decisions on teachers during the first 90 days of their contract. Present policy allows for teacher contract terminations without cause or the provision of any professional development or support. The rules say that these administrative behaviours are OK. However, when working with a poor-performing novice teacher, it may serve a leader well if intense instructional support is provided. In other words, there are managerial rules that can be taken as givens or there are proper, moral practices (Bogotch 1988) which can be chosen. PROPEL participants were taught that turnaround school leaders know the difference between “have-to” edicts and moral practices, that is, they understand when to comply and be obedient without question and when to challenge authorities respectfully for the good of students, the school, and the community.

According to one senior administrator/PROPEL adjunct:

The reason we started with the Seasons of Schools was to try and help organize the operational work around specific times of the year that school personnel could understand. After many years as principals ourselves, we realized that there is a cycle for each of the major areas of principals' responsibility. The cycle of these activities correlated to the four seasons. Also many of the activities and sports schedules again correlated to the seasons. Therefore, the Seasons seemed like a perfect fit.

It takes many years of practice to become a skilled school manager. So, along with the metaphor of seasons, PROPEL instituted year long mentoring in three learning settings: (a) within school internships, (b) apprenticeships in other settings, and (c) career mentoring relationships with clinical supervisors and adjunct instructors/administrators. Knowing the seasons is one level of knowledge; practising them again and again provides a deeper appreciation for how managerial tasks connect and can make a climatic difference in schools moving away from “crisis management” to seasons.

2.7.3 Metaphor 3: Dance, as in the Dance of Leadership: Learning the Steps

The metaphor of dance was perhaps the most straightforward of the three metaphors to emerge in the PROPEL curriculum work group, especially as it was applied to the course titled Leadership Theory and Assessment. The most obvious reality for principals is organisational structure in terms of knowing and following rules and regulations. Public education is a highly regulated field and more so under the centralisation of NCLB and RTTT. Therefore, throughout the PROPEL program, participants were introduced to structures contextualised as “the District’s-way.”

Coaches, clinical supervisors, and high-level school district administrators, however, understood that school-based leaders needed to understand the limits of structures and where there is some elasticity or space for (a) personal growth, (b) community needs, and (c) creativity and innovation. Thus, structures were taught as baseline platforms, not the whole picture of leadership. The idea of thinking on your feet, being able to dance, move, pivot, all at the same time, connected to the realities of life for school administrators. In fact, the metaphor of dance, as with seasons and falling in love, wasn’t just about turning schools around, it was also meant to create new space for reflecting on and critiquing school leadership.

Administrators assigned to low-performing schools are far more constrained by structures, mandates, regulations, and rules than those in more successful sites. There are severe limits on time and space for being creative and innovative. Government oversight officials, including district-level administrators, closely monitor leadership and classroom behaviours within these settings. Conversely, in higher performing schools, there exists more latitude and space for school leaders and their faculties to manoeuvre. Therefore, the task of turnaround school leadership is to somehow figure out how to create spaces to change daily routines. To accomplish this, PROPEL used the metaphor of leadership dance steps introducing the idea of dancing for your own good health, seeking out new partners, and changing daily routines in order to “make the familiar strange” and also to end strangeness and strangers within large urban schools and surrounding communities (Bogotch 2011b). We began with simple tasks: taking a new route to and from school; parking in different locations around the building; entering through different doorways, if

possible; changing morning routines in greeting parents, students, and faculty; visiting different hallways at different times; and holding new and different conversations. The idea was to dance to a different rhythm even as everything else stayed the same. Change, we argued, had to begin with the school leader, not with teachers, parents, students, or communities. Participants were told to expect resistance in the form of mildly sarcastic comments such as “what are you doing here” or “you must be slumming to come to this part of the campus/building.” The PROPEL curriculum then offered participants new language and actions which earnestly and sincerely addressed the resistance. In other words, new routines generate new casual conversations throughout school buildings which require more time (and space) to develop new relationships. These little “I” ideas/actions might lead to new relationships and new ideas from those inside the building. We wanted PROPEL participants to experience a counter-hegemonic leadership approach in the face of more and more externally driven authorities and mandates. We encouraged each participant to practise leadership within the role of teacher leader, as they continued to learn and study. Ultimately, the goal was for turnaround school leaders to teach leadership as everyday practices (Bogotch 2011b). That is, leadership instruction becomes a matter of how one can become everyone’s leader every moment of the day versus how leadership is represented hierarchically through the “normal” routines of announcements, rounds, walk-throughs, meetings, dismissals, and so on.

The idea of dance was expressed by a PROPEL developer as follows:

...I find dancing an apt metaphor for educational leadership as it speaks so eloquently to the arduous journey that a principal or leader must undertake if he/she is serious about leading for change. I like the connotation of passion, struggle and pain that is embedded in the dance metaphor for such a leader knows intuitively that ardent desire for perfection/utopia may never be attained, yet he/she remains forever poised, on his/her toes in mid air, amidst the setbacks and the challenges arching to achieve that ideal state. The passion is everything.

All three metaphors, dance, seasons, and falling in love, were meant to reveal hidden meanings, create spaces for planned and improvisational activities, and help school leaders see the world anew. According to Ehrich and English (2012, p. 16),

Educational leaders are required to learn techniques and skills which they do from formal institutions of learning and from other avenues. Yet being an effective leader by demonstrating a repertoire of techniques and skills constitutes only part of the picture as leadership is a moral, cultural and educational endeavour. Like dancing, leadership brings together not only discipline and the ritual within the practice, but also the senses, feelings and the emotional aspects of the performance including passion.

PROPEL’S use of metaphors was to bring leadership to life imaginatively.

2.8 A Concluding and Emerging Metaphor: Jumping Together

Alone, neither school district personnel nor university faculty has the answers for turning around schools. There are physical workplace differences, organisational cultural differences, and incentive differences, each of which combine to create the separate lifeworlds of schools and universities. That said, there is a *gestalt* psychology (Lewin 1951) as well as a strong professional pull bridging these two divides. It is structurally as simple as an architectural beam bridge where manipulating the distances between the beams explains the strength of interrelationships (akin to Fullan's change forces); or it is as complex as a suspension bridge with numerous cables pulling and pushing the forces to create a bridge capable of handling concurrently, both turbulent weather and heavy traffic in the extremes. What is clear is that the tide has turned as U.S. government officials at the federal, state, and local levels are now in support of building partnerships. The rub, as always, is in implementation as many school district personnel and many university faculties have not had professionally positive experiences as true "partners" in educational reforms. Whether this is attributed to the theory-practice gap, or to the minimally successful track records of school leadership preparation programs, or to the fact that the institutional cultures of schools and universities continue to grow further and further apart is immaterial. All of the explanations or excuses miss the point of public education, that is, to educate present and future citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions for a democratic, socially just, and economically successful society. What is needed is the metaphor of how to "jump together" (Gould 2003) and combine resources for the common good. PROPEL participants are faced with an obvious contradiction concerning time: PROPEL as *rapid and temporally short* learning, practice, and change for schools versus the *slow and temporally persistent* problems of poverty, crime, drugs, and illiteracy that are consistently tied to most schools that are underperforming. It therefore becomes our purpose, first and foremost, to develop in our participants a *social conscience*, not just at the level of awareness, but at the level of action. As with Fullan, Murphy, Leithwood, and Duke, the processes unfold in stages: (a) leadership knowing the rules; (b) leaders mastering the rules as competencies; (c) leaders manipulating the variables inside the rules to create more time and space; (d) leaders knowing how to bend the rules; (e) leaders proceeding innovatively, cautiously, and courageously; (f) leaders proposing alternative rules (of turnaround); and (g) leaders promoting new rules for inside and outside the system.

Thus, the final metaphor to emerge in the curriculum inquiry is one that addresses leadership for learning contradictions productively. We borrowed the metaphor from Stephen Jay Gould (2003) but traced its antecedents to the change literature of Michael Fullan's change forces (Bogotch et al. 2010). Gould refers to this as jumping together or consilience. Fullan's change theory (1982) makes the point that our educational theories and practices are more than binary opposites, meaning leaders do either *x* or *y* (see Table 2.2). For Fullan, the category change moves to leaders

Table 2.2 Fullan's binary opposites

Fullan's binary opposites [transitions]
Cognitive versus social development goals
Fidelity versus variation
Privatism versus professional development
Specific versus generic capacity for change
Grandeur versus incrementalism

Table 2.3 Gould's consilience: jumping together

Organisational science & school improvement models	"Jumping Together" metaphors of PROPEL: consilience	Humanities: democracy and social justice: purposes of public education
Raising test scores	Falling in love	Beyond test scores: raising hopes
Managerial controls and focus	Seasons	Systems thinking
External authorities: delivering curriculum	Dance steps	Professionalism and internal locus of control
Targeted resources	Seasons	Broadening the tax base and funding equitably
Individual turnaround school leaders-short-timers	System accountability: across the districts, the state, and universities	Beyond neo-liberal politics and the morality of competition

who are able to do x and y even as they move in opposite directions. When we added Gould's notion of "jumping together" the two variables of x and y are themselves transformed with new meanings, new skills, new understandings (Table 2.3). That is, as x comingles with y , x and y are no longer the same as they were before; their interactions changed them both. The binaries articulated by Fullan in Table 2.2 were just his first step in the change process. In bringing the binary opposites together, he was able to connect past knowledge to present knowledge and through staff development, aid educators to be less afraid of the future. By connecting self-development with social development, it not only opens up new personal relationships, but also moves towards relationships within and across generations and beyond the school. In each instance, the combinations of variables help participants see possibilities beyond fixed realities, from what is to processes of what educators believe ought to be. So while Fullan made these sociocultural connections, the organisational science paradigm of school improvement typically ignored community leadership and development.

By inserting consilience into turnaround school leadership, PROPEL built bridges from school improvement research findings to more humanitarian educational policies and practices. This disruption of the dominant top-down mandated discourses through the use of metaphorical language did not upset the sensibilities of high-level administrators. In fact, the umbrella of PROPEL provided all parties

with ways to move forward collectively by jumping together, that is, bringing together and bridging organisational science and the humanities, thus allowing turnaround school leaders to integrate their past, present, and future knowledge/actions in leadership, learning, and change.

Consilience itself connects the vertical hierarchies of bureaucratic school systems with the need for turnaround school leaders to study and act on the problems and needs of communities.

2.9 Conclusions

The tensions created by centralisation and driven by external authorities have exacerbated the U.S. educational situation such that there are too few complicated conversations as described here. This situation has a human cause and thus it is up to educators to rethink educational meanings/actions. The PROPEL program was designed for individuals who are committed to leading schools in the most challenging circumstances. The program is also built upon the commitment that schools, communities, and systems need to come together in a process that has to be “turned around.” From the beginning to the end, the different meanings of turnaround have and will continue to evolve beyond the traditional notions of raising test scores and heroic school leaders. The PROPEL commitment is systemic, that is, it calls for the system’s commitment to turning around schools, communities, and the district at every level. For without that system’s commitment, nothing changes and school leaders will continue to come and go for all the wrong reasons.

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