A qualitative case study of a self-initiated change in South Korea

Author: Baul Chung

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2506

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2011

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
ABSTRACT

A qualitative case study of a self-initiated change in South Korea
Baul “Paul” Chung
Dissertation Chair: Andy Hargreaves, Ph. D.

After a decade of large-scale educational reform there is now a growing interest in
grass-roots self-initiated change (Datnow et al., 2002; Hargreaves, 2009; Hargreaves &
Shirley, 2009; Shirley, 2009). Yet, self-initiated change (SIC) remains largely
undertheorized in the literature of educational change. Even the advocates of self-initiated
change do not clearly specify the underlying mechanisms and the multi-dimensional
processes by which SIC occurs.

Utilizing a qualitative case study approach and a conceptual framework that
draws from incremental institutional change theory and the literature on social
movements within institutions, this study explored the following research questions:

• What mechanisms do the change agents of SIC employ, How do they implement
these mechanisms and why do they employ these mechanisms?

• What are the characteristics of the processes of SIC? What is the pacing and
sequencing of the change?

• How does SIC unfold over time, and why?

In answering these three initial questions a fourth research question emerged that
summates the other three:

• What implications does an investigation of self-initiated change in one school
have for understanding existing theories of self-initiated and imposed educational
change?
Findings from this study revealed that self-initiated change involved a recombination that embodied the ideal of “change without pain” by balancing change and stability (Abrahamson, 2004). The process of self-initiated change turned out to be slow-moving (Pierson, 2004; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). Mindful juxtaposition (Huy, 2001) and a dialectical perspective (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009) were required to address the multiple and contradictory dimensions of change. Based on these analyses, I propose ways of conceptualizing SIC as: “change without pain”; “slow-moving change”; and “dialectical/ cyclical change.”
Acknowledgement

When I arrived in Boston from South Korea in 2003 to pursue my Ph.D., I could not have imagined how fruitful this time would be for me, or how this extraordinary intellectual journey would transform my life and my worldview. I am blessed with many people who made this journey easier and more endurable through their unsparing support.

First, my thanks go to my advisor Andy Hargreaves, whose support and guidance made this dissertation possible. Over the eight years when my research interests changed many times, Andy waited with his admirable patience and always had time for me despite his busy schedule. He has always supported and inspired me along the way to the completion of this dissertation. He has been unfailing in his integrity and commitment to his students, and this dissertation is more complete as a result of his guidance. I will forever be grateful to Andy.

The two committee members, Dennis Shirley and Robert Starratt, have been consistently supportive of this research since its inception. Professor Shirley has been graciously helpful and encouraging. He inspired me to explore the possibilities of community and social change. I would like to make him my model of a respectful scholar and an attentive teacher. A special tribute goes to professor Starratt, the third member of the committee. Professor Starratt always taught me the values of ethics and social justice in education and helped me overcome the temptation to gravitate towards the short-term pursuit of more ephemeral gains.

My heartfelt thanks go to the members of South Castle Elementary school – especially Mr. Rhyu, Mr. Han, Mr. Kang, and Mr. Yoon - whose intellectual insights,
courageous candidness, and collaborative relationships made this dissertation possible and rewarding.

I must mention the friendship of my doctoral colleagues without which the years of study would have been difficult. I thank Kristin Kew for her warmth, friendship, support, and practical advice. She always listened to me with a lot of empathy. I have always thought that Kristin must be my personal guardian angel. Kristin, there is no one like you, you are my soul friend. I had a lot of fun with Allan Cameron who was incapable of being unhappy. Whenever I felt that things were not working out, or when I needed a friendly beer, I turned to him. Allan always made me feel confident and pleasant again. Thanks also to another colleague of mine, Jake Conca, who was always a cheerful coach. When I was preparing for my two-week long comprehensive exam, he kindly invited me to his place, provided me with much-needed encouragement and nourishment, and shared his experience with the exam.

While working on this dissertation, I began teaching at Seoul National University of Education, my alma mater, due to the thoughtful consideration of President Kwang-Yong Song and Professor Soo-Hyun Chung. I am deeply grateful to this opportunity to teach. No matter how tired I was, the time with graduate students always gave me new energy.

I thank my parents. I have been blessed with their constant love and firm belief in me. They have always supported me unconditionally in everything I do. Without their support I could not have even dreamed of finishing.
I should highlight the contributions of Scott Stewart whose editing efforts made this dissertation more readable than it would otherwise have been. He had to work under tight time constraints and his assistance has been valuable.

Above all, I have to thank to my wife, Koeun Kim, but I don’t know how. She was bedrock of the support for my intellectual adventure. Koeun has been always most tolerant and supportive. She is my best friend. I owe to her an eternal debt of gratitude and love. Over the years, Eugene and Yujung arrived to change our lives forever. Their love and faith in me serves as my joy and my inspiration. I thank my sons for constantly reminding me of the profound rewards of working for educational change. I would like to dedicate this work to my sons.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement........................................................................................................i-iii

List of tables..................................................................................................................iv

Chapter 1: Introduction..................................................................................................10

Chapter 2: The literature review...................................................................................11

Chapter 3: Methodologies............................................................................................48

Chapter 4: Initiating change..........................................................................................67

Chapter 5: Sustaining change.......................................................................................101

Chapter 6: Institutionalizing change.............................................................................151

Chapter 7: Discussion:

    Reconceptualizing self-initiated change.................................................................181

Chapter 8: Conclusion..................................................................................................195

TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 3.1: The changes of student enrollment of SCE over time...............................54

Tables 3.1: Key events and activities of SCE...............................................................57

Tables 3.2: Participants and their roles at SCE............................................................62
CHAPTER I
Introduction

Preface

This study examined the dynamic growth and evolution of a self-initiated school change in South Korea from 2001 throughout 2010. In this study, I explored whether a small incremental SIC can sustain change and even become consequential at a system level. While I was searching for a topic for my dissertation, one day I came across news articles introducing the transformation of SCE, which was my alma mater, in spring in 2007. While my connection with SCE was obviously relevant to my interest in this research, it was not the only or even primary source of my research motivation. My fascination with this study grew out of my long-standing research interest in teacher and educational change. This interest was influenced by my personal background of family of teachers. And this led me to go to graduate school. Given my background and research interest, SCE’s teacher-initiated change seemed to me a perfect topic.

The attraction subsequently became stronger by the recognition that the development of SCE raised intriguing questions for our understanding of self-initiated change and large-scale reform. The remarkable success and growth of Self-initiated change demanded explanation. I thought analyzing the case would provide insight into change theories in a different way large-scale reform advocates assume. Large-scale reformers regard self-initiated change as minor, superficial, and ephemeral. Instead, the large-scale reformers focus on generating even bigger, faster, and tighter reforms across large number of schools at once like big bang theories of change. It is not surprising that
large scale reform advocates who want quick turnarounds and wholesale reform find self-initiated change unattractive. However, the common portrayals of self-initiated change as ephemeral, unsustainable, and unspreadable are inaccurate and misleading. Christensen (2000) claims that “in any sector, a radical and fundamental innovation sneaks in from below (p. 104).” Indeed, consequential change often begins as a challenge to that authority. One way to visualize self-initiated change is similar to a boy who beats a giant by taking advantage of a giant’s underestimation of him. Instead of challenging the existing system head-on, change agents of self-initiated change work within the institutional system by engaging in creative recombination and reinterpretation. This way change agents infiltrate the existing system without unnecessary pain. Thus, we need to think more carefully about these taken-for-granted assumptions or myths in the discourse of large scale reform.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates approaches to social movements and institutional theory. I developed this approach as I discovered that neither was able to fully account for the development of this particular school change. Social movement theory could not fully account for institutional activists who occupy formal but paradoxical positions within the institution and deploy piecemeal or small-win change strategies. However, institutional change theory that emphasizes abrupt and external shocks in accounting for fundamental change overlooks or even dismisses endogenous or gradual forms of change. Thus, I started to look at more recent social movement literature and institutional change theory in the hope of finding the tools to account for this case. Along the way, I found the tools available in endogenous
incremental change theory and literature social movement within institutions. This combined framework provides a useful guide for self-initiated change and fills gap in both literature.

Chapters 4 through chapter 6 are the finding parts of this study. They are chronological in organization. SCE’s innovation was not produced in a vacuum. It occurred under the noses of the hierarchical and bureaucratic Korean school system. It was still subject to conventional definition of schooling and institutional pressures. How could SCE fit into the existing system? In chapter 4, I addressed this question.

Self-initiated change is neither easy to establish nor sustain once they are set in motion. From the outset, survival and sustainability had always been the most immediate and crucial issue for SCE. Chapter 5 addressed how SCE overcame the challenges embedded in self-initiated change. Then, beyond its survival, I also examined how it amplified change and generated system-level change while seeking to maintain the original mission.

The adherence to idealistic notion of organic and spontaneous governance, ad hoc problem solving, and symbolic innovation inadvertently caused recurrent conflicts and internal contradictions. Furthermore, the continued growth and success of SCE paradoxically triggered problems that amounted to an “attrition of change” even at the height of SCE’s development. What happens when David becomes Goliath? “Remaining David can be even more challenging than becoming David in the first place (Ganz, 2009: 21).” Chapter 6 addresses this question of how SCE addressed the formidable challenges
and dilemmas of sustaining change while maintaining original innovation by examining the institutionalization process of SCE.

The primary purpose of this study was to open up the black box of self-initiated change, specifically focusing on the change mechanisms, processes, and multi-dimensional nature of self-initiated change. Based on these findings, in chapter 7, discussion section, I discussed the change mechanisms, the slow-moving and multi-dimensional change processes of self-initiated change. This section shows that self-initiated change can provide an alternative approach to change that is less destructive, destabilizing, and painful but nevertheless consequential over time. With regard to change process, I show that the incremental approach enables change agents to manage risks of attempting disruptive change by balancing change and continuity and solidifying early gains. Regarding the change dimensions, I suggest that while in isolation self-initiated changes can proceed in uneven ways and be insufficient, incomplete, and sometimes even painful due to limited capacity, resource, and power, self-initiated change can lead to consequential change when they occur in a proper sequence and pace. Thus, we can better understand the complexities and paradoxes that are common to self-initiated change and many contemporary educational changes by employing more longitudinal and historically grounded studies that trace the evolution of educational change over long periods.

Large-scale reform may be necessary, and even preferable in certain situations. Large-scale reform is not, however, the only option. Meanwhile, Self-initiated change provides no silver bullets either. When large-scale reform and self-initiated change
combine in a more delicate, creative and rhythmic way, a consequential change is more likely, much quickly, and far less painfully. It is my hope that this study can help rethink the dominant discourse about large-scale reform towards endogenous and incremental, but nevertheless consequential and widespread, self-initiated change from the bottom-up and from the peripheries.

**Introduction**

The past decade has seen the rise (or dramatic return) of large-scale reform (LSR) and the decline of self-initiated change (SIC) (Fullan, 2001, 2009; Hargreaves, 2009). This return is evident in recent legislation such as No Child Left Behind policy (USA) and the Every Child Matters policy (UK) (Hargreaves, 2009). Many other countries are following suit, making this a global phenomenon. This rise of LSR tends to be legitimized by the premise or judgment of its proponents that SIC generates at best minor and superficial adjustments to a largely stable system (Thelen & Streeck, 2005; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). They claim that we need to look at more system-wide and well-coordinated reform than unpredictable SIC (Barber, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Fullan, 2000, 2009; Honig, 2004; Hopkins, 2007).

I argue that there are many reasons to be skeptical about these claims – skepticisms that are expressed in a growing literature that examines LSR (Berliner, 2006; Day & Smethem, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hargreaves, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Ravitch, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011; Zhao, 2009). Drawing on the literature, I argue that legitimizations and rationales for the promotion of LSR are theoretically and empirically weak and misleading. First, the underlying causes of the return of LSR are
much more complicated politically and educationally than a simple reaction to the SIC (Hargreaves, 2009; Honig, 2004; Sarason, 1990). The idea of LSR has been used by conservatives to create an ideological climate that suggests that school choice and competition among schools based on standardized test results contributes to national economic competitiveness in the globalized and knowledge-based economy (Hargreaves, 2003, 2009). Some more liberal researchers and reformers have also embraced the idea of LSR and used it to attempt to close the achievement gap between haves and have-nots (Fullan, 2000, 2005). Advocates of both positions claim that LSR is necessary because of the ineffectiveness of SIC. This underlying thesis of LSR about SIC needs to be subjected to empirical scrutiny. Without this effort, I argue that the aggressive advancement of LSR might enhance political expediency. Until we think more carefully about the taken-for-granted reasons for the rise of LSR (e.g. “What values are involved? Who will benefit from the change? How achievable is it?”), the power of LSR will remain unchecked, thus making SIC suffer further (Fullan, 2000).

Second, I argue that the propensity to downplay SIC is misleading for it is based on premature judgment. Contrary to the claim of LSR that SIC is not consequential, research in the business and social sectors suggests that many important changes are not systematically organized at the beginning or dramatically consequential in their intentions. Nor do they depend on managerial authority or professional change agents. Indeed, SIC often proceeds as a challenge to authority, sometimes in unpredictable ways, still the results can be consequential (Armstrong, 2002; Chen, 2009; Huy and Mintzberg, 2003; Lounsbury and Schneiberg, 2008; Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Reay et al, 2006). I argue
that existing educational change literature has not yet developed adequate understandings of SIC that might better explain the abovementioned patterns of change. Indeed, most SICs have been devised as first-order changes that aimed to improve the quality of what already existed rather than as second order changes that meant to disturb basic organizational features and substantially alter the way that schools perform their roles in the first place (Bartunek, 1984; Cuban, 1988; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Reay et al., 2006; Scully & Segal, 2002). This analytical blindspot within the existing educational change literature leaves us without proper tools for understanding SIC and thereby results in researchers and reformers gravitating towards LSR repeatedly. In other words, it is the impoverished theoretical state of SIC that makes SIC more vulnerable to the pressure from LSR advocates. This tendency has trapped policy-makers in a vicious cycle of “repetitive large-scale change syndrome” in which problems generated by one wave of LSR are followed by yet another wave of LSR that only compounds the problems (Abrahamson, 2004). In response, some scholars are looking for alternative and more radical directions such as SIC, while other scholars who still stay with LSR also look to SIC as a source of inspiration to improve LSR (Hargreaves, 2009). As a result, there is an opportunity for greater receptivity to the possibilities for SIC and a growing interest in how to bring about SIC.

However, even the advocates of SIC do not clearly specify the underlying mechanisms and the multi-dimensional processes by which SIC occurs. As a result, SIC resembles mysterious black boxes whose contents need to be unpacked and examined. Vague concepts such as “bottom-up change” or “school-based change” undermine the
theoretical and empirical credibility of SIC and make the public more sympathetic to LSR. It is thus crucial to articulate tighter and more convincing arguments and evidence about the mechanisms and processes underlying SIC.

Identifying the mechanisms, the processes, and the multiple dimensions underlying SIC is by no means straightforward. The mechanisms of SIC often proceed in small and incremental steps. They may be layered on top of old ones, and involve the recombination of already existing practices and principles. The process of SIC is often not as neat and linear as top-down reform (Huy, 2001) and often requires change agents to be mindful of and alert to temporal ordering, sequencing, and pacing. Identifying multiple dimensions of SIC is even more tricky since the processes of SIC might be uneven (Campbell, 2004), thus demanding understanding of the various combination and juxtaposition of its dimensions over time.

This study explores an incremental but consequential SIC that relies on local, organic changes. It cautions against premature judgment of the inefficacy or inadequacy of SIC that is often presumed within the core arguments of LSR. Rather, I argue that although less dramatic than LSR, the gradual and piecemeal process of SIC can be cumulatively consequential for bringing about substantial educational change (Thelen & Mahoney, 2010).

Two emerging bodies of literature provide useful guidance in answering these questions: endogenous incremental institutional change theory and social movements within institutions. Incremental institutional change theories offer useful analytical tools for making sense of the change mechanisms of SIC that often recombine existing
elements or practices in new ways at the change agents’ disposal (Abrahamson, 2004). This literature is rooted in a longer term perspective that appreciates the temporal processes, such as timing, sequence, and pacing, in accounting for various slow-moving changes. It offers new and helpful conceptualizations that allow us to understand gradual and endogenous educational change processes.

The literature of social movements within institutions may enable us to recognize how “institutional activists” who occupy formal status within a variety of institutional arenas achieve social change or social movement goals by drawing on the pre-given arrangements and practices around them rather than undertaking wholesale destruction or disruptive replacement of existing structures and practices (Abrahamson, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004; Schneiberg, 2007; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). These bodies of work help us understand and theorize the patterns of SICs that unfold incrementally and evolve in subtle and unpredictable ways over time.

South Castle Elementary school (SCE) is particularly suited for this study’s purpose of examining small, gradual, but nevertheless consequential SIC. Amid an unfavorable climate under the entrenched bureaucratic school systems and the ongoing neo-liberal assault on schools since 1990 in South Korea, SCE has cultivated an inspiring grass-roots and bottom-up SIC. SCE has successfully sustained its innovation since its inception in 2000 and has been replicated in more than 20 schools on a voluntary basis. Moreover, in 2010, the progressive superintendent launched a bold plan to create more than 100 innovative schools in the region based on the design and practices of SCE. The process of SCE’s innovation has often not been as neat and linear as top-down reform but
has been full of stops, starts, reversals, and redirections (Campbell, 2004; Fullan, 2001). Moreover, study of SCE is able to capture this non-linear longitudinal process of change rather than cross-sectional or snapshot (Pierson, 2004; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

By conducting a qualitative case study of a distinctive SIC in South Korea and its evolution over a decade and by applying conceptions developed in institutional change theory and social movement theory to the case, this study advances understanding of the mechanisms, processes, and dimensions of SIC and therefore contributes to the development of educational change theory in general.

My dissertation will explore three questions

- What mechanisms do the change agents of SIC employ, how do they implement these mechanisms and why do they employ these mechanisms?
- What are the characteristics of the processes of SIC? What is the pacing and sequencing of the change?
- How does SIC unfold over time, and why?

In answering these three initial questions a fourth research question emerged that summates the other three:

- What implications does an investigation of self-initiated change in one school have for understanding existing theories of self-initiated and imposed educational change?
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the related literature for this study, as presented in Chapter two, focuses on four distinct areas: LSR and SIC, change mechanisms, change dimensions, and change processes.

Large-scale reform (LSR)

A brief review of LSR provides a useful background for introducing and extending the self-initiated change model that will be the focus of this paper. LSR refers to “deliberate policy and strategy attempts to change the system as a whole” (Fullan, 2009: 102). Here, the system is defined as “a government and all its schools—what is called tri-level reform: schools and their communities, districts or region, and state” (Fullan, 2009: 102). This new language and move represents a shift either from the traditional top-down strategies in which innovations or reforms were mandated and imposed by districts and states or from the decentralized and democratic strategies in which teachers and schools have the freedom and autonomy to pursue their own needs. LSR seeks to move towards more system-wide and well-coordinated reform that integrates top-down and bottom-up strategies (Barber, 2009; Fullan, 2000, 2009; Hopkins, 2007).

However, critics raise questions about LSR strategy and its underlying assumptions. First, they argue that the integration of top-down and bottom-up strategies is misleading. They claim that although LSR sought to synthesize the two approaches it often slipped into favoring the top-down end of the pole over the other because of
accountability measures, district pressures, and financial incentives (Datnow et al., 2002; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hopkins, 2007). I argue that this tendency has created a vicious cycle of “repetitive large-scale change syndrome” in which policy-makers addressed problems generated by one wave of LSR with yet another wave of LSR - only to compound the initial problems (Abrahamson, 2004).

Second, the underlying assumptions of LSR are weak. For example, one of the assumptions of LSR is that individual school reform will never add up to large-scale reform (Fullan, 2000, 2009; Honig, 2004; Park & Datnow, 2009). Significant bottom-up innovations existed only as outliers that failed to spread and last over an extended period to reach widespread and effortless stages of institutionalization (Hargreaves, 2009). In a similar vein, Honig (2004), in her article on policy implementation, argues that bottom-up reform as a policy strategy for decades has faltered in implementation. She claims that “bottom-up reform falters in part because implementation efforts largely focus on changes in schools or at the bottom of hierarchical education systems but not on the “up” in bottom-up reform (Honig, 2004: 529).” As Park and Datnow (2009) claim,

“The contemporary education policy marks a shift away from the idea that change happens organically, one school at a time. Instead, there is a focus on creating a systematic infrastructure to support change across a large number of schools at once (p. 209).”

Yet research in the business sector and in social reform suggests that many consequential changes are not systematically organized when they begin, are not dramatically consequential in their intentions, and do not depend on managerial authority or professional change agents. They often begin as a challenge to that authority
(Armstrong, 2002; Chen, 2009; Huy and Mintzberg, 2003; Lounsbury and Schneiberg, 2008; Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Reay et al, 2006).

Until we think more carefully about these taken-for-granted assumptions or myths, the power of LSR will remain unchecked, making SIC further suffer. My purpose in this study is not to launch a comprehensive attack on the LSR thesis that includes a thorough and exhaustive examination of each and every type of LSR, but to develop articulated arguments about the mechanisms, processes and multi-dimensional aspects of SIC that can be make it sustainable and consequential. Because of the limitations of LSR, there are signs of a renewal of interest in grass-roots self-initiated change efforts (Datnow et al., 2002; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Oakes & Rogers, 2006, 2007; Shirley, 1997) and in modified versions of LSR that are inspired by SIC.

**Self-initiated change (SIC)**

Contrary to conventional understanding, it is not always straightforward to tell whether a change is internally initiated or not in the first place. SIC is often conceptualized as change purely driven by internal actors without any external elements or impositions (Hargreaves, 2004). SIC is, therefore, often associated with autonomy. Yet, beneath the surface of the sharp distinction between LSRs and SICs, LSRs do not always begin as fresh inventions or brand new changes (Campbell, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004).

These puzzling findings prompt us to question the nature of self-initiated changes. There is never a clean slate. Most changes in social arenas emerge through “multiple waves, over time, via sequences or successive stages of translation, layering, theorization and assembly that elaborate and innovate on previous, partial accomplishment”
(Lounsbury and Schneiberg, 2008: 664). Even failed change efforts or legacies of previous mobilizations serve as platforms and foundations for subsequent change initiatives in the same or other directions (Schneiberg, 2007). Educational scholars have offered surprisingly little empirical guidance about how to determine which pattern of change has occurred (Hargreaves, 2004). A notable exception is Hargreaves’ insightful study of examining educators’ distinctive emotional responses to SIC and to mandated or imposed top-down changes. In his study, Hargreaves (2004) reveals that “many seemingly self-initiated changes have always had their origins in external reform movements and initiatives” (p. 303). Hargreaves’s (2004) solution to this puzzling finding is to redefine top-down reform as exclusive reform and SIC as inclusive reform. Hargreaves’ findings and resolution open up promising questions and stimulate theoretical developments: “Why and in what way does SIC adopt or recombine the elements of externally mandated reforms?” “What are the change mechanisms of SIC? “What are the processes of SIC over time?” “How can we reconcile LSR with SIC in a more organic way?” Two emerging bodies of literature that provide useful guidance in addressing these questions: endogenous incremental institutional change theory and social movements within institutions.

SIC: an endogenous and incremental model of change

Prevailing change theory has emphasized exogenous shocks and critical junctures in accounting for fundamental changes and radical reconfigurations that disrupt the status quo (Campbell, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Pierson, 2004; Thelen & Streeck, 2005). Scholars thus commonly look outwards to explain transformation, invoking external shocks or
abrupt reforms as key conditions for change (Schneiberg, 2007) and overlook how endogenous or gradual forms of change can accumulate into consequential change (Pierson, 2004; Reay et al., 2006; Scully & Segal, 2002; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). In the absence of analytical tools to characterize and explain the modes of endogenous and gradual change, much of the institutional change and organizational change literature explicitly or implicitly relies on a punctuated equilibrium model that draws an “overly sharp distinction between long periods of institutional stasis periodically interrupted by some sort of exogenous shock that opens things up, allowing for more or less radical reorganization” (Thelen & Streeck, 2005: 3; see also Gold, 1999). In a similar vein, in the literature of organizational change, incremental change tends to be understood as a first order change rather than second order change (Bartunek, 1984; 2006; Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 2001). A first-order change comprises a modest and minor modification in the established ways of organizational functioning and meanings. Second-order change, on the other hand, refers to “qualitatively discontinuous shifts in the interpretive schemes, or schemata, that organization members use to understand underlying dimensions of their organization (Bartunek, 2006:1884)”. In recent literature, however, researchers have attempted to provide analytical tools for understanding endogenous gradual change (Campbell, 2004; Schneiberg, 2007; Pierson, 2004; Thelen & Streeck, 2005; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010).

First, scholars argue that attributing institutional change to critical junctures or jolts is in conflict with the social constructivist roots of institutional theory in the first place (Huy & Zott, 2007; Munir, 2005). From the perspective of a social constructivist, a
crisis or a critical juncture is not inherently disruptive (Campbell, 2004; Munir, 2005). It is meaning, or sense-making, that makes it disruptive. Unless jolts or critical junctures are perceived as such, they do not necessary lead to change or transformation (Campbell, 2004; Munir, 2005). Even exogenous shocks must be endogenously interpreted as such to become a trigger of change (Munir, 2005). This leads us to re-examine the complex process by which institutional change comes about. Rather than looking for the trigger in highly visible external factors, we need to pay close attention to how actors convert an otherwise mundane or unremarkable event into a critical juncture or crisis through ongoing sense-making or the construction of meaning (Fullan, 2001; Munir, 2005). The point is that, for change to occur, the change agents have to convince various stakeholders who are resistant or nervous that their change is worthy of support through the construction of meaning or sense making (Fullan, 2001; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hargreaves, 2004; Huy & Zott, 2007). The change agents need to substantiate the ineffectiveness and injustice of existing practices or raise the “sense of urgency” (Kotter, 2008). They also need to come up with alternative solutions and change projects to the problems and convince their constituents that the proposed change would resonate with the institutional context.

Second, an emerging body of work from historical institutionalism has identified endogenous sources of change that have been overlooked. They argue that change may emerge endogenously from the loophole or structural hole of apparently stable institutions (Fullan, 2001; Thelen and Mahoney, 2010). In other words, change may occur in the “gaps” and “ambiguity” between the rules and their interpretation or the rules

16
and their enforcement without the presence of exogenous shocks and critical junctures (Thelen and Mahoney, 2010). This suggests that it is not useful to draw a sharp line between stability and change. Overemphasizing the static and locked-in aspects of institutional stability and the unfettered nature of institutional change may ignore the reality that many significant changes can still be generated within the continuity of existing institutional arrangements. The ambiguities that institutions embody provide critical openings for the creativity and agency of change agents. By exploiting or capitalizing on these openings, the change agents can establish new precedents for action that can transform the way institutions allocate power and authority in their preferred direction (Fink, 2000; Scully & Segal, 2002; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). These forces of change may come unexpectedly from surprising quarters in ways that cannot be predicted. Even a seemingly revolutionary change may, on closer examination, be reduced and folded into a series of endogenous changes and a process of continuous evolution (Campbell, 2004; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). Thus, institutional scholars maintain, in order to adequately conceptualize these forms of endogenous change, we need to redefine the ontological concept of institutions such that institutions are entities that are fraught with tensions and ongoing contestations (Clemens and Cook 1999). For example, Schneiberg and Clemens (2006) argue that institutions do not just generate stability and positive feedback, they also "generate grievances (through political exclusion)... actors who are aggrieved but not co-opted are an important source of pressure for institutional change" (Schneiberg and Clemens, 2006: 35). Within this definition of institutions, the sources of change are often profoundly political in nature (Hacker, 2005; Palier, 2005;
Schneiberg, 2007; Thelen, 2004; Thelen and Mahoney, 2010). This requires us to focus on the role of actors and the internal dynamics in the process of change.

Third, the construction of meaning for change or the endogenous sources of change do not automatically precipitate change. We thus need to identify the mechanism and processes of change (Campbell, 2004; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). In order to actually introduce significant change into entrenched and resilient systems (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), change agents often deploy low profile change initiatives that are designed to remain somewhat “under the radar” (Reay et al., 2006: 994; See also, Fink, 1999, 2000). High profile changes may trigger potential opposition and the resistance of institutional incumbents who seek to maintain the status quo (Fink, 2000; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Pierson, 2004; Scully & Segal, 2002). On the other hand, institutional change can be generated, for example, through working around existing rules and constraints or implementing changes alongside or on top of the existing system (Abrahamson, 2004; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Raeburn, 2004; Reay et al., 2006; Scully & Segal, 2002; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). Changes may thus be often passed and implemented on the basis of an ambiguous agreement, yet they may still be transformative in nature. Later in this chapter, I discuss three change mechanisms underlying the endogenous and gradual forms of change: layering, conversion, and recombination.

Fourth, the process of endogenous and gradual change tends to be slow and incremental. “Important change often takes place incrementally and through seemingly small adjustments that can cumulate into significant institutional transformation” (Thelen
This change process is also known as the small win strategy defined as one in which people “identify a series of controllable opportunities of modest size that produce visible results” (Weick, 2001: 427; See also, Reay et al., 2006). Although this slow and incremental process can seem like a glacial move for those who want change very badly (Huerta, 2002; Reay et al., 2006), the accumulation of small wins can result in consequential accomplishments while sustaining the energy of change by projecting a sense of progress (Huy, 2001; Reay et al., 2006). This suggests that temporal sequencing and pacing matter a great deal in accounting for endogenous and gradual changes (Campbell, 2004; Pierson, 2004; Reay et al., 2006).

**SIC: a small-scale social movement or micro-mobilization**

In identifying and elaborating endogenous and incremental forms of change, a number of scholars draw on social movement theory (Armstrong, 2002; Campbell, 2004, 2005; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006, 2009; Raeburn, 2004; Scully & Segal., 2002). Classic social movement theory tends to depict movements as outsider groups protesting the policies of a state (Armstrong, 2002; Binder, 2002; Davies et al., 2005; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Lounsbury & Schneiberg, 2008; Raeburn, 2004).

Collective efforts to achieve social change in a variety of institutional arenas including workplaces, education, religion, and the military fit uneasily, or not at all, and seem pointless with classic social movement theory because the classic social movement theory “focuses on change efforts initiated by the powerless that designed to redress economic and political inequalities through non-institutionalized channels” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 6.; see also Katzenstein, 1998; Raeburn, 2004; Santoro & McGuire, 1997; Scully
However, a number of scholars define social movements more broadly. Armstrong (2002) defines social movements as “collective efforts to change the rules of the game – action that is not simply reproducing the rules of a given area or the status quo (p. 11).” She argues that social movements differ from other kinds of collective action in that they seek to change the terms of some established social arrangement. Binder (2002) also argues that “the kinds of struggles that have become far more common ... take place within institutions rather than “in the streets”; and they target institutional power rather than what is ordinarily considered to be “political” power’ (p. 11). This redefinition of social movements highlights how classic social movement theory marginalizes collective efforts to achieve social change in a variety of institutional arenas.

Forms of social movements that occur within institutions may differ from conventional social movements in terms of movement participants and their strategies and tactics. Social movement participants, in this approach, are more likely to be “institutional activists” (Santoro & McGuire, 1997) who occupy “formal statuses within the government and who pursue social movement goals through conventional bureaucratic channels” (p. 503). Similarly, Meyerson and Scully (1995) coined the term “tempered radicals” to describe the paradoxical status of activists embedded in multiple institutional contexts. They defined “tempered radicals” as “individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and probably at odds with, the dominant culture of their organizations” (p. 586). This conceptualization challenges the widely held
view that social movement participants are necessarily non-institutional actors (McCarthy & Zald, 1997; Tilly, 1978; McAdam 1982; W. Gamson, 1990).

Within this renewed framework SIC can be conceptualized as micro-mobilization. McAdam (1988) has defined a *micro-mobilization context* as “a small group setting in which processes of attribution are combined with rudimentary forms of organization to produce mobilization for collective action” (p. 133). The smaller scope of action implied in the term "micro-mobilization" may be appropriate for the type of challenges SIC poses to the existing system and the changes they hope to affect. The change agents of SIC may avoid large-scale actions for fear of painful repercussions from the institutional incumbents if their changes are seen as too disruptive or pose too great a threat to the existing order. Instead, institutional activists may have to balance their sense of justice and moral purpose, and their desire for radical change with the need to minimize risks to their careers and their organizations (Scully & Segal, 2002). Institutional activists may have to garner management support and even occupy positions of power by themselves to secure “a counter center” (Rojas, 2007) to achieve their goals (Scully & Segal, 2002). Activists may have to deploy piecemeal or small-win change strategies by asserting that cumulatively such changes can significantly alter a formative context (Scully & Segal., 2002; Reay et al., 2006).

This reconceptualization of SIC may also provide an alternative way in which LSR top-down reforms and social-movement like bottom-up change can also be reconciled in a more organic way than is proposed by LSR advocates. The LSR model proposes that the two approaches (imposed and self-initiated) can be combined by
deploying rigorous external accountability mechanisms for building local capacity. However, the obsession with control, data, and required professional development has often impeded genuine local capacity and authentic student learning (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), making everything “too” systematic (Huy & Mintzberg, 2003). Instead, bottom-up change (SIC) can occur within and alongside the existing institutional contexts, generating cumulative effects that can transform broader institutions over time (Armstrong, 2002; Hargreaves, 2003; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003; Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Raeburn, 2004). In this renewed framework, there is no sharp distinction between LSR and SIC. Rather, systematic planning, data, and professional development programs from the top can be used to create an environment more conducive to organic change or SIC that can be consequential over time (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003). For example, Warren (2001) claims that the Texas Industrial Area Foundation (IAF), a grass-roots educational movement, was able both to create broader, state-level change initiative and to maintain a focus on participatory democracy because it simultaneously engaged in both bottom-up and top-down change processes. In sum, SIC can be more consequential than is usually appreciated, and the simple dichotomy of SIC and LSR should be reconsidered.

The change mechanisms

According to Elster (1989), “mechanisms are the nuts, bolts, cogs, and wheels that link causes with effects” (p. 3; cited from Campbell, 2004). The identification of change mechanisms enables us to understand the details of causal processes. “It reduces the risk of lapsing into either erroneous functionalist accounts in which institutional outcomes are
explained by their consequences, or spurious accounts that mistake correlations among variables for causal relationships” (Campbell, 2004: 63). Institutional scholars have proposed three mechanisms which can account for endogenous and incremental change: institutional layering and conversion and recombination.

1. Institutional layering

Institutional layering has been proposed as a distinct mechanism of incremental change. Given the recognition that formal established institutions may be difficult to replace wholesale (Pierson, 2004), in a layering process, an institution is never wholly replaced but rather evolves by the addition of rules alongside what already exists (Thelen & Streeck, 2005). Each additional layer is set in motion as a “refinement” of or “correction” to existing systems, but this process can cumulate into a transformative change in the long run. In other words, institutional layering involves the “partial renegotiation of some elements of a given set of institutions, while leaving others in place” (Thelen, 2003: 22). Layering may also involve the creation of “parallel” or potentially “subversive” institutional tracks. Institutional actors lacking the capacity to overturn existing institutional arrangements may try to nurture new ones, in the hope that over time they will be able to assume more and more prominence, and in the long run such layered arrangements can present successful challenges to the institutional status quo (Thelen, 2003; Pierson, 2004). Since the new layers crafted in this subtle way do not disrupt and may directly challenge vested interests and established institutions, they typically do not provoke direct and highly visible counter-movements by upholders of the status quo (Thelen and Streek, 2005). Thelen (2005: 23) argues that the underlying logic
of change through layering is “different growth” that operates and grows more quickly than the existing system so that over time newly added layers fundamentally change the overall trajectory of development as existing institutions “stagnate and lose their grip” over time.

2. Institutional conversion

The second mechanism is institutional conversion: the process in which existing institutions or policies are reoriented to serve new ends. Institutional conversion occurs when rules remain formally the same but are interpreted and enacted in new ways (Thelen, 2003). Conversion is not driven by neglect in the face of a changed setting. Instead, it is produced by actors lacking the capacity to destroy an institution who actively exploit the inherent ambiguities of that institution. Through redeployment and recombination (Abrahamson, 2004; Campbell, 2004), they convert the institution to new goals, functions, or purposes. In some cases, conversion results from the incorporation of marginal actors who build a new coalition that uses existing institutional arrangements in new ways rather than dismantling them (Thelen and Mahoney, in press). Thelen (2005) argues that “conversion is different from layering in the sense that in this process institutions are not amended or allowed to decay as much as they are redirected to new goals, functions, or processes (p. 26).” Conversion is more likely when there are new environmental challenges to which actors respond by deploying pre-given institutional repertoires in new ways; it can also occur through shifts in power relations such that marginal actors who had been blocked out of the system take it over and transform it in a subversive way.
Previously, while layering and conversion have been posited as separate and distinct mechanisms, these two change mechanisms are increasingly conceptualized as intimately interconnected in the sense that the two processes often coexist at two different levels in the vested hierarchy of institutions and systems. For example, layering is often the means by which conversion ultimately occurs since actors typically cannot change a whole system with one single dramatic measure (Boas, 2007). Similarly, Kay (2007) coined the concept of a “tense layering” to describe the fact that a significant change requires multiple and tense layering that can accumulate over time. The two mechanisms are path-dependent\(^1\) in the sense that the range of repertoires with which actors can innovate through those processes are more or less fixed by existing institutional principles and processes and that the resulting change “differs from but still resembles old ones by virtue of their containing many elements from the past (Campbell, 2004: 70).” The unifying approach of conversion and layering mechanisms is more capable of accounting for the complex process of gradual institutional change. Because the evidence supporting these models remains limited, there is room for empirical studies that can address them. Particularly, existing research has not yet adequately addressed the way in which actors may choose to change certain rules but not others, in one way but not another, and why.

\(^1\) According to Djelic and Quack (2007), there are two versions of path-dependence: “In the general sense (soft version), it refers to the idea that events occurring at an earlier point in time will affect events occurring at a later point in time. In a stronger sense path-dependence characterizes historical sequences in which contingent events set institutional patterns with deterministic properties into motion (p. 162).” The varieties of literature oscillate in their use of the concept of path dependence between these two poles of soft and strong versions.
This is why we need to turn to the change mechanism of recombination (Abrahamson, 2004).

3. **Recombination**

As Meyer and Rowan (1997: 345) observe in their study, “the building blocks for organizations come to be littered around the social landscape; it takes only a little entrepreneurial energy to assemble them into a structure.” Similarly, the mechanisms of SIC may often involve the rearrangement of elements that are already at hand or are inherited from the past (Hargreaves, 2004). They may also entail the blending in of new elements (Abrahamson, 2004). In either case, the result is an innovative recombination of elements that constitutes a new way of configuring organizations, social movements, institutions, and other forms of social activity (Campbell, 2004).

In contrast to the mechanism of creative destruction often deployed by the advocates of large-scale and abrupt change that destroys and removes existing organizational assets to make room for newly created ones in which excessive and unnecessary emotional pains is involved (Abrahamson, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004), the mechanism of recombination suggests alternative, less disruptive and less painful approaches to change by using organizational resources that already exist in a new fashion. Recombination can be a useful strategy for SIC in the sense that “because little is destroyed, there is less to have to defend or justify” within the existing institutional context (Abrahamson, 2004: 17). Moreover, people typically tend to view change initiatives that recombine existing arrangements in a new way as more bottom-up than top-down (Hargreaves, 2004; see also, Abrahamson, 2004: 17). In this way,
recombination mechanisms help the change agents of SIC bypass unnecessary interruptions from the district bureaucracy while avoiding change-related anxiety and pain.

Moreover, recombination may be a continuous process rather than just a single burst of organizational change. The recombination mechanism often involves repetitive and recursive changes (Denis et al., 1996, 2001). It may often emerge through cyclical processes and via sequences or successive stages of layering and conversion that elaborate on previous accomplishments (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). Recombination may be path-dependent insofar as the range of choices for recombinant change is largely fixed by the set of elements that are already available in the existing repertoire (Campbell, 2004; Thelen, 2004; Thelen and Streek, 2005). The possibility that multiple models or initiatives may exist side by side suggests that change created by the mechanism of recombination may be less straightforward than is generally recognized. As a result, the changes may often be made up of potentially contradictory and conflicting dimensions or logics.

**Change dimensions: three perspectives of educational change**

Educational change and innovation is multidimensional, involving different, interrelated, and sometimes conflicting dimensions (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Campbell, 2004; Fullan, 2001; House & McQuillan, 2005; North, 1990; Scott, 2001). As such, if we want to examine how educational change has occurred and what pattern it has followed, it is important that we specify and track multiple dimensions over time (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Campbell, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2007;
Identifying the relevant multiple dimensions is particularly important as educational change unfolds over an extended period of time. One way to analyze educational change that unfolds over time is to examine multiple “frames” (Bolman and Deal, 2003) or “perspectives” (House & McQuillan, 1998) (Campbell, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2007). House and McQuillan (1998) indicate that three perspectives provide a useful guide to analyze educational change through interrelated perspectives. Their three perspectives are technological, cultural, and political ones (House & McQuillan, 1998). House and McQuillan (1998) claim that educational change should embody an appreciation of all three aspects to achieve maximum organizational alignment and effectiveness. They argue that an inadequate or partial understanding of these three dimensions results in reform failure or superficial changes that alter one dimension while leaving the others untouched (House & McQuillan, 1998).

Identifying multiple change dimensions is also important when change involves a lumpy and uneven process in which one dimension may lag behind another (Campbell, 2004). While LSRs can be encompassing, simultaneous, and expeditious in order to achieve coherent and consistent configurations rapidly, SICs proceed in incremental and sequential ways due to limited capacity, resources, and power (Huy, 2001; Pierson, 2004; Reay et al., 2006; Scully & Segal, 2002; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). However, educational scholars often assume that educational change is far more integrated than is the case (Campbell, 2004; North, 1990; Scott, 2001). The incremental institutional change literature I introduced earlier in this chapter provides a useful analytical tool for tracing educational change and its dimensions that may be slower and more incremental.
than observers believe (Campbell, 2004; Pierson, 2004; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). In this study, I will deploy House and Mcquillan’s (1998) three perspectives in combination with incremental change literature to identify and track multiple dimensions of a SIC that has unfolded over a decade. In the following, I will overview the three dimensions of change: technological, cultural, and political.

1. *The technological dimension*

The technological dimension consists of “concepts like input-output, specification of goals and tasks, flow diagrams, incentives, and performance assessment” (House & McQuillan, 1998: 198). The technological dimension emphasizes rationality, analysis, logic, facts, and data (Bolman & Deal, 2003, 2006; House & McQuillan, 1998). This dimension concerns more “substantive” dimensions of change including organization structure, resource allocation, and actualized strategies (Denis et al., 2001). Within this dimension, a desirable change agent is “knowledgeable, thinks clearly, makes right decisions, has good analytical skills, and can design clear structures and systems that get the job done” (Bolman & Deal, 2003: 21).

The technological perspective may be the most extensively used for examining educational change (Datnow et al., 2002). The traditional top-down reform models have incorporated this technological perspective that assumes an ordered, linear sequence of activities which involve planning at the top, a division of labor, and passive actors who work at the local level of bureaucracies (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Datnow et al., 2002). More recently, large scale reform increasingly incorporates the assumptions of the technological reform models (Hargreaves, 2009). In order to make sure of consistency
across the system, reformers have concentrated on evidence-based and data-driven
curriculum development, instructional training, and intervention strategies to raise test
scores and narrow achievement gaps in literacy and numeracy (Fullan, 2009; Hargreaves,
2009; Park & Datnow, 2009). These technical-rational and data-driven strategies can be
used for various purposes, such as evaluating progress, monitoring student performance
and improvement, and judging the efficacy of local, school-level curriculum and
instruction (Park & Datnow, 2009). However, while the technological and data-driven
perspective can be useful for reformers to coordinate many schools across a system based
on rigorous and accurate information, this perspective also comes with some risks. The
strategies based on the technological, data-driven perspective may also cause problems
when reformers are preoccupied with hasty tests without developing creative ways of
engaging the public and educators to promote the common good (Hargreaves & Shirley,
2009).

SIC can often be characterized by uncertainty, risk taking, politics and time
pressure, and consequently much decision making deviates from such technological-
rationalistic models. Instead, decisions are made in less linear and more unpredictable
ways (Fullan, 2001). Thus, while the technological perspective matters, if SIC change
agents were solely focused upon the technological dimension, initiating and sustaining
SIC might not be possible. We also need to consider other dimensions. Next, I turn to the
cultural dimension of change.

2. The cultural dimension
The cultural dimension concerns changes in the dominant meaning or interpretive scheme of organizations (House & McQuillan, 1997; Denis et al., 2001). The importance of skillful management of culture in the change process has been widely noted (Bolman & Deal, 2003, 2006; Denis et al., 1996; Gioia et al., 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Huy & Zott, 2007; Munir, 2005). Scholars have suggested the crucial roles of vision, imagination, meaning and creativity (Bolman & Deal, 2003, 2006; Fullan, 2001, 2005; House & McQuillan, 2005). Other empirical findings demonstrate that performing symbolic actions, in relation to the change agents’ credibility, moral purpose, and claims of early symbols of achievement, can help acquire legitimacy and resources (Fullan, 2001, 2003; Huy & Zott, 2007).

Gioia et al. (1991) suggest that symbolic actions may be deployed “to disguise an intended second-order change by making it appear as a less threatening first-order change (p. 379).” This symbolic strategy may be especially relevant to SIC in the sense of altering the goals, structures, and roles of the existing institutional arrangements without abruptly dismantling them (Fullan, 2001; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). Moreover, when SIC is founded by a small group of like-minded people who share common beliefs, symbolic strategies are a good starting point particularly start-up organizations with limited resource and legitimacy (Armstrong, 2002; Chen, 2009; Fullan, 1998, 2001; Polletta, 2002). Tolerance or even preference for symbolic displays of commitment and conformity may help things hold together during the early stages (Kraatz, 2009).

Institutional theory has posited that organization manages the contradiction between technical and legitimacy demands by engaging in ceremonial conformity (Meyer
 especially during the early periods, this practice can be deployed by change agents to navigate their institutional constraints and possibilities (Armstrong, 2002; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fullan, 2001), complementing weak substantive resources with strong symbolic activities. At the same time, excessive emphasis on symbolic activities may lead to micro-management, organizational hypocrisy and other detrimental side-effects, if the visions and goals promoted by symbolic activities are not matched by corresponding actions - delegitimizing the credibility of the change agents and of the change in general (Campbell, 2004; Denis et al., 2001; Kraatz, 2009; North, 1990; Selznick, 1949, 1957).

While the existing literature on the cultural dimension tends to emphasize the cognitive-based aspects of symbolic management or construction of meaning, a growing body of research is investigating the emotional aspects (Hargreaves, 1998, 2001, 2004; Huy, 2002; Huy & Zott, 2007). Bottom-up and grassroots change (SIC) can be highly exciting, joyful, and rewarding as it generates new leaning, commitments, accomplishments, and meaning (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2004). But it also involves anxiety, uncertainty, exhaustion, and loss of confidence, especially at the early stages (Fullan, 2001). Fullan suggests that creating and sustaining changes is similar to riding a rollercoaster because it arouses the ups and downs of strong emotions (Fullan, 2001). As a result, emotions play an important role in the context of bottom-up and grass-roots change including SIC. While a few studies of emotion and change have focused on how individuals with little discretionary power regulate their own emotional expressions in the face of imposed change (Hargreaves, 2000, 2004; Huy & Zott, 2007), there are also
emotional issues in SIC characterized by high risk and uncertainty (Hargreaves, 2004; Huy & Zott, 2007). Nascent organizations or changes can also weather the formidable challenges involved in the change processes through emotional assurance, affective-based trust building, and relationship building (Huy, 2002; Huy & Zott, 2007).

To review, Bolman and Deal (2006) argue that change agents have the hardest time grasping the “elusive and mysterious influences of symbols (p. 2).” They argue that the change agents often devalue culture as fuzzy and irrational (Bolman & Deal, 2006). As a result, we clearly need to pay attention to the cultural dimensions of change. However, while cultural practices or symbolism can evoke powerful meanings and provide changes or organizations with much needed legitimacy, the benefits may come with risks. Furthermore, cultural or symbolic practices may not be sufficient for creating and sustaining change over time (Campbell, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Kraatz, 2009; Selznick, 1949; 1957). That is, even the cultural practices which are widely accepted and supported do not necessarily lead to substantive outcomes in action (Hallett, 2010; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Ambiguity and confusion surrounding symbolic practices may develop into fierce politicization in circumstances in which changes are concerned with challenging existing distributions of power or disrupting the status quo of the prevailing systems (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves et al, 2001; Oakes and Lipton, 2002). Thus, we also need to take the political dimensions of change into account.

3. The political dimension
Educational reform is very much a political process (Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Sarason, 1990). The political dimension involves “power, authority, and competing interests (p. 198).” More specifically, the political dimension is concerned with,

“How power is exercised over others or developed with them, the ways that groups and their interest influence the innovation and reform process, and how the ends of education address, comply with, or challenge the existing distributions of power in society” (Hargreaves et al., 2001: 12).

At no time does the political dimension seem more important than during the period of change (Denis et al., 1996, 2001). Change “not only generates the opportunity for new arenas of micropolitics, it also often awakens latent hostilities” (Datnow, 2000: 134). In order to successfully bring about bottom-up change or SIC, it is thus crucial for change agents to be mindful of the micropolitics of change and build a power base of allies, network, and coalitions (Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Bolman & Deal, 2006).

Within the contexts of the ambiguous authority, divergent interests, and unclear goals that surround the many bottom-up and grass-roots approaches, leadership plays a vital role in the change processes (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Kraatz, 2009; Selznick, 1957). The key tasks of change leaders include: defining the meaning of change and goals; balancing integrity and legitimacy with conformity; and keeping an organization on the edge of order and chaos (Fullan, 2001; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003). However, leadership can also be characteristically vulnerable during the early stages of bottom-up changes in which the power structure tends to be collective or distributed (Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Selznick, 1957). Thus, researchers should have a keen awareness of the political effects in terms of the distribution of formal and informal power, competing interests among constituents and between short-term and long-term
goals, and the evolution of leadership in the process of change (Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Mehan & Chang, 2010; Spillane et al., 2001).

Mehan and Chang (2010) claim that the political dimension is the least studied area among the three dimensions of change. Oakes and Lipton (2002) maintain that change literature falls short because it assumes that the change processes is neutral and therefore overlooks the importance of the power and politics. Bolman and Deal (2006) also argue that change agents are reluctant to address the political dimension because they see its dynamics as manipulative and because they cling to “the illusion that if organizations were run right, they wouldn’t be political” (Bolman & Deal, 2006: 2). Thus, it is important that change agents acknowledge the importance of the power embedded in change processes and adequately address the challenges related with the dimension (Blasé, 1998; Datnow, 2000). At the same time, Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest that overemphasis of the political dimension may downplay the role of structural and cultural features in organizing everyday life, so all three dimensions are important. Researchers need to relate the external elements of school to internal political behaviors.

Change process

The examination of process is concerned with understanding how things evolve over time and why they evolve in the manner they do. Educational change moves through three distinctive stages of initiation, implementation, and institutionalization (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves et al., 1998). Although often represented as linear stages, the process of change is often indeterminate, precarious, and reversible (Huy, 2001); process
data are messy; and the boundaries between the stages of changes are often hazy (Fullan, 2001). For these reasons, the task of identifying process issues is in no way easy. For example, what happens at one stage of the change process strongly affects subsequent stages, but new factors also emerge. In turn, decisions at the initiation stage may be substantially modified during the implementation stage in a continuous interactive way (Fullan, 2001).

The process of SIC can be less clear than that of implementing top down reform through discrete stages (Huy & Mintzberg, 2003; Denis et al., 1996, 2001). It often involves messy processes and occurs in more chaotic and unpredictable ways behind the scenes (Huy & Mintzberg, 2003). SIC is more likely to occur accidentally, and may take the form of immediate calls for action without much preparation and specific corresponding strategies (Fullan, 2001; Plowmen et al., 2007). In other words, many SICs challenge existing institutional orders in unusual ways without clear plans and corresponding resource allocations (Huy & Mintzberg, 2003). In SICs the actors have to attempt to change an organization while simultaneously running it (Muncey & McQuillan, 1996; Honig, 2009).

Furthermore, the change process often comprises a backward movement when actors recognize growing mismatches between the espoused goals and actual enactments and thus are encouraged to reexamine their initial beliefs and values driving change. Hence, the process of SIC can be non-linear, iterative, interactive, cyclical and regressive (Campbell, 2004; Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Fullan, 2001). This suggests that we need to pay attention to the temporal ordering, sequence, and pacing of change especially with
regard to changes that unfold and evolve over a long period of time (Huy, 2001; Langley, 1999; Pierson, 2004). One common interpretation of the sequencing of the change process involves three stages of initiation, implementation, and institutionalization.

1. **Initiation**

Where does new educational change come from? Sarason (1972, 1997) lamented that the creation and initiation of educational change had not yet been studied adequately. He claimed that although there are ample studies of the implementation of educational change, very few studies have examined how educational change comes into being (Sarason, 1972; See also, Mehan & Chang, 2010). Given the dauntingly contingent nature of the origin of change and the sheer number of factors that affect the initiation of change (Fullan, 2001; Lounsbury & Crumbley, 2007), it is understandable that educational change scholars have focused on the slightly more tractable and robust subject of implementation rather than initiation (Lounsbury & Schneiberg, 2008; Pierson, 2004). However, an emerging body of scholarship provides an accumulation of case studies and theoretical insights regarding the processes and conditions that contribute to the initiation of change (Abrahamson, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Clemens, 2002; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2004; Mehan & Chang, 2010; Sarason, 1972).

Initiation consists of “the process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change” (Fullan, 2001: 47). The direction of change may be more or less defined at this early stage. However, precise goals and needs are often not clear at the beginning. The more complex and ambitious the changes are, the greater the problem of clarity. People often acquire clearer understandings about their needs and goals only
after they start taking actions during the implementation stage (Fullan, 2001).

Furthermore, the potential problems of need, clarity, complexity, and competing interests cannot be resolved at this early stage. This lack of clarity and resolution is passed on to the implementation stage and becomes more discernible there (Fullan, 2001). For these reasons, the relationship between initiation and implementation is loosely coupled and closely intertwined (Fullan, 2001). However, some policies and changes are deliberately stated in an ambiguous manner at the beginning in order to avoid conflict and promote broad-based acceptance (Fullan, 2001; Palier, 2005; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). The ambiguous and unclear goals and procedures underlying the change, meanwhile, may trigger great anxiety and frustration among those sincerely trying to implement them (Fullan, 2001).

Since bottom-up or grass-root SIC, by definition, attempts to break up the status-quo, its initiation often confronts resistance by institutional defenders trying to protect their vested interests and positions within the institutional arrangements. As challengers, or change agents, often do not have the power, resources, or legitimacy to produce SIC by themselves, they engage in a “grassroots” form of activity to build their coalition with other stakeholders who share complementary interests and resources (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006). Responding to these challenges, institutional dominants react with direct and indirect forms of “repression” or “avoidance”, material concessions that address challengers’ grievances, and strategies to co-opt and accommodate the challengers’ initiatives in ways that thwart the challenge (Piven & Cloward, 1977). Unless
Institutional challengers outmaneuver institutional defenders’ strategies, they may win a few battles, but they do not ultimately win any wars (Binder, 2002).

In order to bypass the resistance of institutional incumbents and address competing interests among constituents, the aforementioned strategic ambiguity is deployed even by change agents of SIC by constructing the strategic goal differently according to the various constituents or accommodating wider organizational interests whilst also enabling collective organizational action (Jarzabkowski et al., 2011; Palier, 2005). Thus, the profoundly political interaction between institutional challengers and defenders can generate ongoing tensions and compromises in initiating SIC (Greenwood et al., 2002; Hoffman, 1999). Existing literature has largely focused on the actions of leaders and change agents in creating and promulgating changes, drawing attention away from the emergent, multilevel nature of how a new change emerges (Lounsbury & Crumbley, 2007).

2. Implementation

Implementation consists of “the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expecting change” (Fullan, 2001: 65). It involves the first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice (Fullan, 2001). Transition from initiation to implementation is commonly understood as transformation of “initial impulse into routinized practice” (Mehan & Chang, 2011: 66). However, the processes beyond initiation are often more intricate because they involve more people and real change is at stake (Fullan, 2001). Things may become worse and more vague than as people grapple with the real meaning and early
outcomes of change (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) calls this the implementation dip. The implementation process can be even more complicated because new policies and reform programs are frequently initiated without the follow-up or preparation time necessary to generate adequate outcomes (Fullan, 2001). These are essentially a matter of formal myth and ceremony, designed more to legitimate or obscure current practices than to achieve substantive change in how an institution operates (Campbell, 2004; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

With regard to SIC, lacking the authority to mandate or the resources to implement change (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Pierson, 2004; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010), institutional challengers tend to rely on symbolic strategies in addition to incremental and subversive change strategies based on the belief that the symbolic change will ultimately induce substantive change in the long run (Campbell, 2004; Fullan, 2001; North, 1990). Sometimes, this symbolic strategy can arise from the change agents’ shifting interpretation of change over time in addressing emerging gaps between the goals and the acts of implementation rather than making a deliberate choice from the outset (Pierson, 2004). Thus, during this stage, a regressive or recursive change may also occur when the legitimacy of change is undermined due to unclear meanings, emergent internal contradictions, or mismatches between goals and enactments (Clemens & Cook, 1999). As a result, implementation is not a singular or straightforward process but rather a set of recurrent and cyclical processes that work in concert in a delicate balance of change and stability and ambiguity and clarity (Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Fullan, 2005). This view challenges research that suggests that change agents seek alignment during

3. **Institutionalization**

Institutionalization is the core concept within institutional theory and has been systematically studied by institutional scholars. According to institutional theory, once a new practice is institutionalized, it is taken-for-granted, experienced as objective reality, enduring and reliably reproduced (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006). Consistent with this, educational change scholars who have been grappling with the problem of change initiatives that rarely last or spread tend to assume that once a certain change reaches the institutionalization stage it will be integrated effortlessly and spread widely (Datnow, 2006; Fullan, 2001).

However, although sustainability generally has been associated with institutionalization, not all instances of sustaining change fit the dynamics associated with institutionalization. Many things persist without ever becoming institutionalized. Alternatively, there are many procedures and initiatives that are institutionalized in the sense of being upheld by law or popular norm, but are not widely used or sustained.

Furthermore, the processes of institutionalization are often accompanied by displacement of formal goals. A critical wing of institutional scholars also challenges the taken-for-granted understanding of institutionalization. These scholars argue that institutionalization has often been accompanied by goal displacement, diminished organizational willingness to be open to the members, co-optation of grassroots processes
and the concentration of power in favor of a small group of organization elites (Michels, 2001; Selznick, 1949: 224).

In reconciling this tension, while Selznick (1957, 1996) emphasizes the positive aspects of institutionalization, he similarly documents its pathologies. He portrays institutionalization as very much “bad news / good news” for an organization (Selznick, 1957, 1996). Thus, he concludes that the institutionalization should be seen as a “fundamentally neutral” process (Selznick, 1957, 1996). Similarly, Green et al. (2009) argue that institutionalization can be both a benefit and a curse at the same time. It is a benefit because “taking successful practices for granted allows actors to interrogate and attend to new and more pressing problems” (Green et al., 2009: 30). It is a curse because “taking successful practices for granted reflects an actor’s failure to consciously make sure that a practice is indeed effective” (Green et al., 2009: 30). Green et al. (2009) claim, “Taking a practice for granted and failing to interrogate and attend to the reasons for its adoption may help the practice persist, but it also increases the probability that the belief in the practice’s effectiveness may decouple from the practice’s actual effectiveness and thus lead to the faddish adoption of spurious practices (p. 30).”

Despite these widespread anomalies in practices, most studies of educational change have tended to equate institutionalization with sustainability, prompting a conflation of the two (Anderson, 2010; Coburn, 2003; Colyvass & Jonsson, 2011; Fink, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Giles, 2006).

There is a contradiction between the emphasis of non-linearity and complexity of the change process within the contemporary educational change literature and the uncritical embrace of the traditional definition of institutionalization. The equation of
institutionalization with widespread diffusion and effortless continuation obscures the complicated nature of the process. As Barley and Tolbert (1997) have argued, scholars in institutional theory as well as educational change literature “have pursued an empirical agenda that has largely ignored how institutions are created, altered, and reproduced, in part, because their models of institutionalization as a process are underdeveloped” (93).

Zucker (1977) defined institutionalization as “both a process and a property variable. It is the process by which individual actors transmit what is socially defined as real and, at the same time, at any point in the process the meaning of an act can be defined as more or less a taken-for-granted part of this social reality” (p. 728). As a process, institutionalization represents the manner of attaining an organizational order that, in turn, reproduces itself (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Green et al., 2009). As an outcome, it represents “the state of having realized this order, and is then reinforced through feedback mechanisms that shape and govern behavior (Colyvas 2007: 465).”

However, there has been imbalance in subsequent research between process and property (outcomes) of institutionalization. Most of the literature of institutionalization has primarily focused on macro level outcomes over processes (Kallinikos & Hasselbladh, 2010). This privileging of outcome or property characteristics of institutionalization over the process aspects assumes that when institutions gain taken-for-granted status, by definition, institutions become self-reproductive without requiring purposive maintaining efforts. This also leads to the problems of equating institutionalization with widespread diffusion. A growing body of scholarship claims that prevalence of change is a poor indicator of institutionalization (Anderson, 2010; Colyvass & Jonsson, 2011; Green et al.,
Sometimes, change is prevalent yet not legitimate. Conversely, sometimes a practice is legitimate yet not prevalent. This conflation of institutionalization with prevalence may lead us to pursue widespread diffusion as fast as possible without taking the depth of the actual practice seriously (Anderson, 2010; Coburn, 2004; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Given this situation, it is also perhaps not surprising that the process of institutionalization including the sustaining of change has been trivialized. Indeed, echoing Scott (2001), Lawrence and Suddaby (2007) argue that institutional research on how to maintain institutions remains an understudied phenomenon and that we need to pay more attention to the ways in which institutions maintain themselves. The point is that it is naïve to think that once institutionalized, change can be effortlessly sustained and widely reproduced. Rather, institutionalization is an ongoing process, and this process may be the trickiest thing of all (Zilber, 2002).

Moreover, the overly positive and optimistic portrait of the institutionalization process within the traditional perspective masks its inherently political nature of it. Institutional theory has emphasized isomorphic change processes that reinforce continuity and reward conformity. Much less attention has been paid to change that is not isomorphic or is subversive in nature. The process of institutionalization is generally seen to give institutional structures a degree of stability and continuity based on the routinized reproduction of practices that are reinforced as a consequence of conformity to social controls and supported by taken for granted beliefs (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Giddens, 1984; Jepperson, 1991). Given the very definition of institutionalization as a form of social reproduction and normalization (Willmott, 2008), the incidents of change that are,
by nature, non-isomorphic or non-reproductive, or disruptive (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), have posed a theoretical challenge. Munir and Phillips (2005) argue “institutional theory has often come under fire for failing to provide robust explanations of non-isomorphic change” (1666). Under this conceptual framework, explaining the institutionalization of the non-isomorphic changes is even more puzzling.

Recent developments in institutional theory revise “the isomorphic imagery” that focuses on diffusion of unitary practices or a singular institutional logic by reconceptualizing institutionalization as a political process fraught with ongoing struggle and contestation (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008; Raeburn, 2004; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). This reconceptualization provides a crucial ontological starting point for a new wave of studying (non-isomorphic) change. It also contributes to a fuller understanding of how the processes of “disruptive” change unfold over time and how these unfolding processes are shaped by strategic and purposive actors rather than ones who habitually engage in the routines and rituals of reproduction (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

When it comes to the institutionalization of the SIC, this new approach is especially helpful for resolving the dilemma between institutionalization and radical change. For example, Elsbach and Sutton (1992) find that many grass-root movements faced a tension between the desire to accomplish their original goal of radical change and the need for institutionalization. As early as Robert Michels’s (2001[1912]) famous analysis of “the iron law of oligarchy”, scholars have maintained that to the extent that formalization and bureaucratization of social movements reduce spontaneity and disruption, these organizations tend to regress to conventional and routine organizations.
Piven and Cloward (1977) claim that institutionalization is antithetical to effective movement and change. However, a growing body of literature on the varieties of social movement organization and participatory democracy turns the negative interpretations of institutionalization into questions (Voss & Sherman, 2000; Polletta, 2002; Clemens & Minkoff, 2004; Chen, 2009). For example, Staggenborg (1988) claims that social movement scholars tend to dismiss any forms of institutionalizing efforts by equating them all together as “bureaucratic.” As a result, collectivist and movement organizations were frequently tyrannized by informal elites without the efforts for professionalization and formalization (Staggenborg, 1988). Warren (2001) examines the difficulties in balancing tensions between local participation and top-down authority in the Texas IAF. He argues that both participation and authority are needed, claiming that “most advocates of participatory democracy have become uncomfortable with discussions of authority, but utopian preferences for pure egalitarian relationships are unrealistic for developing effective power for communities” (2001: 35). His work suggests that social movements will ultimately fail without institutionalization while the process of incorporating top-down and bottom-up strategies is rife with dynamic tensions and is as much emergent as planned (Warren, 2001).

In sum, there has been not much scholarship that examines the complicated processes and the dilemma of institutionalizing change while continuing to seek radical change. This study of SCE is an exploratory attempt to remedy this gap in the literature by detailing the change processes that have struggled to resolve the tensions involved over a decade.
Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presented the theoretical framework of this study. In attempting to understand self-initiated change, this study deploys incremental institutional theory in combination with literature on social movement within institutions. These two bodies of literature provide useful analytical guidance to making sense of the change mechanisms involving layering, conversion, and recombination. These bodies of work also give analytical tools on which we could build to understand and theorize the temporal processes, such as timing, sequence, and pacing, and the multi-dimensional nature of SIC that often unfolds in more nuanced and unanticipated ways.

The next chapter will first discuss the background information of the broader South Korean educational system and contextualize SCE within the institutional environment. Then, I will go into detail regarding the research design and methods I employed to investigate the research question of this study.
CHAPTER 3
Methodologies

Contextualizing SCE within the broader Korean education system:

Many studies demonstrate that there have been dramatic changes in school and educational policies in South Korea since the mid-1990s. They argue that Korea has experienced an abrupt and comprehensive neoliberal educational reform initiated by the first civilian president, Kim Young Sam, after more than thirty years of successive military regimes. They also argue that these reforms have radically transformed the authoritarian and centralized Korean education system into a liberal and decentralized one. This transformative reform movement reflects a global trend in educational change dominated by the neoliberal principles of choice, creativity, excellence, and diversification in contrast to the emphasis on the uniformity, standardization, and equity of education under successive authoritarian military regimes.

Far less studied—because of the prevailing tendency among scholars to assume global convergence on the Anglo-American model of standardized reform—is how the national, local, and institutional contexts of Korea mediate neoliberal reforms and global pressures and how much change has actually occurred and in what way.

Institutional perspectives emphasizing path-dependent change processes “whereby institutions retain many of their important capacities even as they change” (Campbell, 2004: 127) should be skeptical about the idea that neoliberal reforms and the pressures of globalization are inexorably leading towards homogenization on the Anglo-American educational reform model. Instead, institutionalism scholars seek to address the
question of how neoliberal reform is modified by existing institutional constraints and change mechanisms (Campbell, 2004).

Korea has experienced an abrupt and swift neoliberal transformation because of the economic crisis triggered by the financial meltdown in East Asia in 1997. The Korean government carried out extensive neoliberal economic and structural reforms during the financial crisis under the guidance of the IMF and the World Bank who demanded a complete restructuring of the old developmental state to emphasize the principles of transparency, accountability, and deregulation. Due to the painful experiences of widespread corruption, lack of accountability, and rigid regulations under military regimes for more than thirty years, the Korean public tended to embrace these reform initiatives with the expectation that those measures would be inevitable and good for establishing a more efficient economy and a better and more democratic society. These principles have provided the basis for restructuring the centralized and bureaucratic Korea educational system. The May 31st educational reform initiated by President, Kim Young Sam, in 1995 emphasized the deregulation of education, the creation of more competition among schools, and more freedom of choice (Kang, 2007; Park, 2004, 2007).

These neoliberal reforms occurred in South Korea during the democratic transition. The first civilian president Kim Young Sam and his successor president Kim Dae Jung, the longtime champion of the South Korean pro-democracy movement, pursued neoliberal reforms by representing them as instruments for democracy that would dismantle the old authoritarian and developmental state. The public believed that democracy meant a departure from the methods of the past regimes. In other words,
neoliberal educational reform has been portrayed as being responsible for the problems in Korean education (Kang, 2007; Park, 2004; Takayama, 2009). Framing it this way and capitalizing on the existing despair and frustration of the people, including progressive educational activists who had struggled against the bureaucratic and paternalistic military regimes for many years, the government mitigated the public’s resistance to the reforms (Lim and Jang, 2007; Shin, 2007).

In relation to the issues of self-initiated change, it should be noted that neoliberal reform ideas had already been introduced under military regimes prior to the critical and historical conjunctures of the IMF crisis and the new democratic presidency (Chung, 2008; Song, 2004). However, only after the critical junctures did the ideas and reasoning become conspicuous and gradually gain momentum to become actual reforms. In terms of institutional perspectives “even apparently revolutionary periods during which changes seems to be radical and abrupt often turn out to be quite evolutionary upon further inspection” (North, 1998: 19-20; see also Campbell 2004: 33).

While restructuring in the financial sectors was swift and successful, the neoliberal transformation of Korean education was not. The May 31 educational reform initiative sparked heated debate on competing logics between choice and equity in educational policies. The thirty-year-long Educational Equalization policy that had prioritized equal opportunity at the sacrifice of school choice by prohibiting any kind of stratification of secondary schools has been seen as the most immovable obstacle to neoliberal reformers. The Korean public’s egalitarian sentiments regarding government policies over market-driven sentiments have been important supporting factors for the
policy (Song, 2003; Campbell, 2004). Meanwhile, the bureaucrats and conservative educators (mostly school administrators) who wanted to maintain their vested interests and the status quo obstructed the implementation of neoliberal reforms by exhibiting their resistance and reluctance to cooperate and by abdicating their responsibilities to do so (Kim, 2005). Consequently, government decision makers were reluctant to make sweeping educational policy decisions that would radically transform educational polices (Campbell, 2004; Kang, 2007). Rather, they worked on options that led to marginal changes from the status quo without provoking strong resistance from opposition groups. They sought instead to establish many kinds of pilot innovative schools, such as pilot independent private schools that would give more choice particularly to middle and upper class families, alternative schools and founded by civil groups for at-risk students, public innovative schools (the Korean version of magnet schools) in mostly rural and disadvantaged areas. Contrary to conventional wisdom, neoliberal educational reform in Korea has therefore not yet precipitated a radical transformation. The effects of neoliberal reform on Korean education have so far been modest and incremental. In terms of incremental institutional change the expansion of diverse types of schools alongside the stable and resilient public school systems can be viewed as kinds of layering and conversion in the sense that liberalization of Korean education proceeded slowly and continuously while attempting a quite fundamental transformation (Thelen and Streek, 2005).

Neoliberal educational reforms in Korea have also been achieved through ambiguous rather than explicit ideological measures. They were based more on common
acknowledgement of the need to overcome the failures of the past authoritarian state than on explicit and coherent analyses of the problems and solutions to them. Although the neoliberal reforms have been introduced in the name of democracy and were perceived as such, the coexistence of contradictory logics of neo-liberalism became the main sources of confusion, anxiety, and bewilderment among constituents and even within the state (Park, 2004). While some people felt betrayed by the new pro-democracy governments that initiated neoliberal reforms resulting in intensified social polarization and inequality, others thought that democracy had been hijacked by the neo-liberal reforms, and still others were perplexed by the lack of enactment of reforms at the local school level.

Although the government initiated and implemented neoliberal reforms, the relatively progressive governments under President Kim Dae Jung and Roh Mu Hyun were ambivalent towards them. Their governments opposed the independent school initiatives because the initiatives undermined social cohesion and equality by stratifying schools (Kang, 2007). This resulting confusion explains why the neoliberal transformation has been a slower and more incremental process than people believe. The same ambiguous and contradicting logics also made the government more susceptible to challenges from pragmatic educators and activists seeking more egalitarian and democratic education by adapting the existing policies to their ends rather than dismantling them. In this way, the ambiguities and contradictions unwittingly promoted “boomerang effects” on neoliberal reforms themselves by providing an important political opening for alternative reform (Lim and Jang, 2007, 449). In other words, ambiguous neoliberal policies “whose rules are opaque and contested, and whose
interpretation and implementation by front-line actors are highly variable” (Hacker 2005, 46) may have allowed significant ‘street-level bureaucracy’ (Lipsky, 1980; Shirley, 2006) and greatly increased the reforms’ susceptibility to conversion (Hacker 2005). This in turn may have paved the way for the spawning of new forms of self-initiated school change (SIC) like SCE’s that are becoming more prevalent under the increasingly decentralized and deregulated arrangements.

**Research context**

South Castle Elementary School (SCE) is located inside South Castle National Park, a rural area on the outskirts of the South Korean capital city of Seoul. The castle was originally built two thousand years ago and was reconstructed in 1621. Situated in this historical and scenic area, the school is rich in historical resources and has a beautiful natural environment. Since 1991, the school saw its enrollment decrease as residents left the park area to pursue jobs and better education. The local school district decided to close the school by 2001. From 1982 to 2006, more than five thousand small schools like SCE in rural areas were forced to close and merge with larger neighboring schools as a result of the government’s school merge and closing policy. Upset about the plan to close the historical and beautiful school, a group of people, including civil activists, progressive educators, and SCE’s principal came up with a plan to save it.

Within several months, more than ninety parents were mobilized and participated in the school saving plan. They decided to join this project, but for very different and often contradictory reasons (Palier, 2005). Based on a shared understanding of the inadequate way in which the former school had been operating, the alternative plan for
saving the school was directed more at opposing the past than at conceiving, or creating, new ways of schooling. Since 2001, SCE has evolved from a small, failing school facing imminent closure into a widely known exemplary innovative school that has established a new form of school change and that has exerted significant influence the debate about school reforms in South Korea.

From 2004, more than twenty schools in rural areas voluntarily emulated SCE’s innovative model. It was no accident that the innovation diffused mainly to small schools in rural areas that shared similar challenges. SCE’s innovation “opened the gate” (Tarrow, 1991, p. 180) for these schools to initiate their own innovations by setting a precedent that demonstrated the legitimacy of innovation and signaled the potential vulnerability of school districts to this challenge (McAdam, 1995; Minkoff, 1997; Raeburn, 2004; Tarrow, 1998). Initially, these schools developed a network (“The Small School Solidarity”) to share knowledge and experiences. This network gradually grew into a social movement seeking to spread their change models beyond rural schools to many other schools in urban and suburban areas.
In May 2009, the newly-elected progressive superintendent of Gyeonggi province, the largest school district in Korea with more than 2000 schools, declared that current educational policies designed to cater to the socially privileged should be eradicated and proposed a policy roadmap of building innovative schools mainly based on SCE’s change model. The progressive superintendent’s electoral victory was itself a landmark event under the entrenched bureaucratic and conservative educational system. He announced that he would launch 16 pilot innovative schools based on the model of SCE’s innovation in 2009, 50 pilot schools in 2010, and more than 100 pilot schools by 2011 (Gyeonggi Province School District, 2009). The Ministry of Education and Science under the current conservative government also launched a new innovative school initiative mainly serving rural areas based on SCE’s change models and announced 55 pilot schools to implement this initiative. According the Ministry, the schools chosen to be converted under the rural innovative school initiative would receive $100,000 to $2,000,000 depending on school initiatives to support successful implementation (The Ministry of Education and Science, 2009).

This tale of relatively smooth and gradual development does not capture the complexity of SCE’s change over time. This description cannot answer the questions of how the project of school change came into being at such a turbulent period of “school collapse” and “neoliberal reform” and how the centralized and authoritarian educational system shape the seemingly school-initiated change. There are ambiguities and internal contradictions in the change processes, in the contested interactions between the education authorities and the school, and in the unintended consequences of change over
The highly centralized bureaucracy of the Korean education system could have blocked SCE’s change if SCE had pursued a highly visible change project. But SCE’s change occurred at the margin, in a rural area where schools suffered from chronic problems of school failure and decreasing enrollment. In a sense, SCE was located in a loophole of the existing system. In addition, the emphasis on diversification and deregulation under the political contexts of neoliberal reforms provided the school with a favorable political opening for change.

However, it was not inevitable that the school would change due to the institutional and political context, or that the change would be shaped by these contexts in a deterministic way. The actors played crucial roles in exploiting the institutional features and political opportunities in their favored direction and made SCE’s change possible. The key actors who participated in the progressive educational movement for more than twenty years skillfully coordinated the change processes and framed change differently depending on ever-changing situations and based on their sophisticated analysis of the institutional and political contexts. They forged alliances and coalitions with various kinds of people and unexpected alliances also emerged in the course of change struggles.

SCE has used a variety of concepts to legitimize its change in continually evolving and highly contested contexts. In the beginning, it represented its change as a small school project mainly geared to schools in rural and disadvantaged areas in order not to provoke resistance from schools in other areas and from the school district administration. Then, the school defined the change as a public alternative school that would serve students at risk within the public school system, arguing that it was one
possible way to diversify public schools. The encounter between SCE and the alternative schools provided SCE with expanded tools for recombination and redeployment of the existing rules and policies in new ways that made SCE more innovative, rather than simply opposing the existing system. When the political winds became more receptive to SCE’s change due to the unexpected victory of the progressive superintendent in the province, this shift was accompanied by a shift in how SC framed its change. SCE moved more aggressively to pursue its goal of making Korean public schools more democratic and humanitarian. However, at the same time, SCE was designated as one of 55 rural public innovative schools by a Ministry of Education and Science initiative in 2009 and so is operating working for the apparently in relation to the neoliberal school choice-friendly policy. These ambiguities, internal contradictions, complexity of change processes, as well as the unintended developments foster an understanding of how school change can be small and incremental, yet also consequential, and it can elucidate the mechanisms by which self-initiated change occurs and operates over time.

<Table 1.> Key events and activities of SCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Key events / activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2000</td>
<td>Inaugural meeting of the organizing committee for saving SCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2000</td>
<td>Explanatory meetings at neighboring schools to attract students to SCE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2000</td>
<td>Explanatory meetings and information sessions for parents in adjacent cities Recruiting teaching staff – Mr. Rhyu decided to join the Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2000</td>
<td>Mr. Yoon, Mr. Kang, and other teachers joined SCE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The founding teachers and parents garnered written</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
endorsement from key community members, local politicians, as well as from the deputy provincial superintendent of Gyeonggi province

February 2001
Intensive efforts to fix the school facilities and maintenance system.

March 2nd, 2002
School began a new school year with six classes of 103 students and 11 teachers.

November 2004
SCE won the most beautiful school of the year award

December 2004
National televised media outlets broadcast SCE’s innovative efforts
SCE was awarded as “most innovative school in the school district.”

December 2006
Mr. Kang (one of the founding activist teachers) transferred to the neighboring school; Mr. Rhyu was formally appointed as an “invited teacher” by the principal for an extended term of four years.
SCE was designated as an autonomous public school by Gyeonggi provincial school district.

February 2008
Incumbent principal Lee left SCE for a new position in a larger school (about 2,000 students) in a neighboring city after eight years of serving at the SCE; The new principal Mr. Yoon (a new lead teacher) arrived at the SCE

March 2008
Choi had served as assistant principal at SCE before he was appointed as successor to the outgoing principal

March 2009
Mr. Rhyu (one of the longstanding founding activist teachers) finally left SCE to assume a senior advisor position to the Gyeonggi provincial superintendent
SCE was designated as a rural innovative school

May 2009
finally left SCE to assume a senior advisor position to the Gyeonggi provincial superintendent
SCE was designated as a rural innovative school

August 2009
by the Korean Ministry of Education, which brought a $1 million grant to the school for three years

November 2009
Korean version of 60 Minutes broadcast a two week program about SCE, which had major repercussions around the country.
Research questions

My dissertation will explore three questions

- What mechanisms do the change agents of SIC employ, how do they implement these mechanisms and why do they employ these mechanisms?
- What are the characteristics of the processes of SIC? What is the pacing and sequencing of the change?
- How does SIC unfold over time, and why?

In answering these three initial questions a fourth research question emerged that summates the other three:

- What implications does an investigation of self-initiated change in one school have for understanding existing theories of self-initiated and imposed educational change?

Data collection

The case study

I conducted data collection over thirteen months from May 2009 to June 2010 in South Korea. In this study, the approach to data collection is a single, exploratory case study (Yin, 2003). Single case study is a common research method for testing and building theory (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006) and has been widely used to study organizational change in which a deep, interpretative and holistic understanding is required (Eisenhardt, 1989; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Zilber, 2002). Many scholars recognize that case study research is useful for providing rich detail and examining strategic decision-making within organizations and social movements (Minkoff and
McCarthy, 2005; Snow and Trom, 2002; Taylor 2007). This case study involves a mixture of induction and deduction. Although the findings and arguments developed are essentially grounded in the data, I drew on concepts from the literature on educational change, institutional change, and social movements within institutions at various stages in the research to enrich and refine understanding (Denis et al., 1996, 2001).

**Gaining access**

My relationship with SCE began when I attended SCE as a student from 1979-1981 when my father was a faculty member. Later I learned of SCE’s transformation in the South Korean news media. As a graduate student, I returned to SCE to conduct a background study from June to August 2007. I first contacted the school in May 2007 to gain access. The decision to give me access to study the school was made collectively by all of the school’s educators at a regular staff meeting. Two weeks after I first contacted the school, the school’s lead teacher informed me that I had permission to conduct my research. He said that my commitment to come back to my alma mater from the United States helped me to gain access to the school. In addition, the educators sought to learn from my study about school change, valuing my study as an objective third-party perspective (Datnow et al., 2002). During the background study, I met and spoke with SCE teachers, principals, and parents; observed various school activities; and attended staff meetings, monthly parents-teachers joint conferences, and annual workshops with allied schools. This gave me a real sense about the school change and helped me to build trust and relationships with SCE teachers, which was necessary in order to conduct more intensive fieldwork.


**Interviewee samples**

I deployed strategies of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to select interview participants (Datnow, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallies, 2003; Stake, 2002). I tried to include all the relevant educators who are currently teaching and have been at SCE for at least one year since SCE is a small school with less than eleven staff members. The sample included eight teachers and two administrators². I interviewed the key educators (Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang who I call the old guard and Mr. Yoon and Mr. Han who I call the new guard) more than five times each. I also conducted interviews with SCE parents who were active in a range of school activities in order to gain a well-rounded perspective of the school change. I identified parent interviewees as I developed relationships with school members. Teachers played a significant role in identifying individuals and setting up interviews and generating a snowball sample of parent members (Evans, 2009). Furthermore, to understand the dynamics between SCE and the school district, I also conducted interviews with school district administrators. In sum, I conducted a series of 36 interviews. The interviews were semi-structured. Since I am native Korean, I conducted the interviews without an interpreter (Rossman & Rallies, 2003). Most interviews took place in informants’ offices or cafes and lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. I did not tape-record the interviews because of the sensitivity of some subjects and because I was more interested in my interviewees’ honest accounts than the school’s official representation (Tilcsik, 2010). In addition, because of issues of language and translation, it would have been challenging for me to fully translate all the

---

² I provide profiles and life-histories of these educators in more detail in subsequent chapters.
accounts spoken in Korean into English (Rossman & Rallies, 2003). Thus, I took notes during each interview, closely paraphrasing interviewee’s accounts, often abbreviating words to keep up, and carefully selecting segments for translation (Tilcsik, 2010). Whenever possible, I recorded direct quotes verbatim and tried to capture the subtle meaning of the original language (Rossman & Rallies, 2003). Table 2 lists the participants and their roles at SCE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Years at SCE</th>
<th>Role at SCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Rhyu</td>
<td>2001 – 2009</td>
<td>Lead teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-present</td>
<td>School district-administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Kang</td>
<td>2001-2006</td>
<td>Lead teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-present</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Lee</td>
<td>2000 – 2008</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Han</td>
<td>2003 – 2005</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007 – present</td>
<td>Lead teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Yoon</td>
<td>2001 - 2004</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 – present</td>
<td>Lead teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Woo</td>
<td>2004 – 2010</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Choi</td>
<td>2002 - 2004</td>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 – present</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Song</td>
<td>2004 - present</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Moon</td>
<td>2006 - present</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Park</td>
<td>2009 – 2010</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jeong</td>
<td>2004 – present</td>
<td>Parent/ vice president of the school council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Shin</td>
<td>2008 - present</td>
<td>Active parent member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation
I sought to gather extensive field data by participating in school activities, and by observing school staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, attending “South Castle Academy” conferences, and nationwide “Small School Network” workshops. Throughout the course of research, I spent a substantial amount of time observing the various activities and events of the school. During the background study from June 2007 to August 2007, I spent two months as a participant observer, present at the school from 8 am to late night almost every day. I tried to gain an insider’s views of their lives – the emic view- and build rapport with the members of the school (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Then, when I returned to SCE to conduct field work in June 2009, I visited SCE one or two days a week until the end of the academic year except summer and winter vacations to observe staff meetings and school activities. I also observed special occasions at the school. While observing these activities and events, I took systemic notes to record my impressions, insights, and emerging themes (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Most field notes were written in Korean, and then significant segments were translated into English to preserve the original meaning for in depth analysis. My field notes amount to about 350 single-spaced pages.

*Documents*

I supplement my interview-derived data with two other sources of data: primary documents and media articles available on the KINDS service (Korean Information Network Database System: [http://www.kinds.or.kr](http://www.kinds.or.kr)). These archival data will be useful for discovering background information and historical data, and for interrogating evidence from other sources more systemically (Merriam, 1998; Raeburn, 2004;
Rossman & Rallies, 2003). To collect primary documents, I consulted internal artifacts and the official documents. These included meetings agendas, meeting minutes, websites, brochures and other materials. I collected more than 153 news articles and several video materials related with the school through the KINDS from 2004-2010 and analyzed them.

**Data analysis**

The data analysis comprises two stages. In an early analysis, I reviewed all of the data and created a longitudinal record of the data that chronicles the school change between 2001-2010. During this stage, I assessed the characteristics and properties of the institutional contexts surrounding SCE’s change by systematically analyzing archival data and interview transcripts. Then, I identified key actors who initiated and the processes of change. By systematically analyzing all interview data and documents, I identified different ways they theorized and justified their change. I sought to distinguish actors’ short-term strategies from their long-term ones and to determine the relationship between them. Furthermore, I sought to uncover the unexpected development resulting from unintended by-products in the course of change processes by focusing on significant divergence, gaps, and mismatches that emerged over time between the preference of key actors’ and the actual development of change processes. Lastly, I assessed the nature and degree of subsequent change within the existing system as a result of SCE’s change. I sought to analyze whether significant changes have occurred at SCE, in other schools, in other educators, and other school systems over the course of SCE’s change process by
tracing shifting interpretations of SCE in school reforms and school policies and by examining the increasing number of schools emulating SCE’s change model.

Next, I developed a coding scheme rooted in existing theory and then elaborated and extended it in dialogue with the data using the constant comparative method, following steps outlined by Bodgan and Biklen (1998, pp. 67–68). After coding all data, I reduced the coding to a concise group of generalizations and then analyzed the findings in light of relevant research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). All the stages of analysis involved an ongoing and reiterative procedure that move between theory, categories, and data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003).

Validity and reliability

In order to enhance this study’s internal validity and reliability, I engaged in ongoing and reiterative member checking from early stages of my data collection. Instead of presenting the research findings and interpretations in the final stage at one time, I constantly engaged in conversations with the school’s educators of the school about the meaning of change and activities. Since I had established trust between the educators and myself, I could probe them for explanation of their assumptions and raise critical questions while maintaining collaborative relationships (Tilcsik, 2010). Sometimes, we had disagreements regarding the meaning of events and we learned from each other’s perspectives to gain a more holistic understanding (Merriam, 1998). In the spring of 2011, I shared findings with key participants to ensure more precise understandings. Since the study was written in English, I needed to interpret my findings and interpretations in Korean. It sometimes took more than four or five hours at a restaurant or at a
participant’s house. Since I constantly engaged in conversations with educators and shared my findings with them, they were not surprised by my findings. This ongoing and reiterative process of participant validation led to greater understanding and enhanced knowledge for both the researcher and the participants (Emerson & Pollner, 1988).

*Ethical consideration*

This study required the participation of human subjects – teachers and administrators. Ethical considerations must remain at the forefront throughout the duration of the study. Throughout the study, I have ensured that the data collected for this study were gained in an ethical manner by following the steps laid out by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules and regulations. I obtained Boston College IRB approval as well as approval from the school. All participants were provided with and were asked to sign informed consent forms in which they indicated that their participation is voluntary and that they are able to withdraw from this study at any point during the study if they chose to. The informed consent outlines any obligations and potential risks related to their participation in the study. The school and all participants were given pseudonyms to enhance confidentiality. Results of the investigation were made available to all participants.
CHAPTER 4
INITIATING CHANGE

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the emergence of SCE’s innovation. The chapter proceeds in five steps. The first section traces how the idea of transforming SCE into an innovative school was conceived amid a school closing crisis. The second section highlights the role that actors (change agents) played in bringing about the school change. I focus particularly on the two activist teachers who actively cultivated and catalyzed change from within the context of existing opportunities and constraints, and also on the hands-off principal. The following section examines how SCE struggled to implement the goals of the school’s original mission in ways to be consistent with its desired ideals and principles while also addressing the internal conflicts and external pressures that challenged the abilities of the school to sustain its day to day operations of change. The fourth section then considers the strategy of cultivating meaning, relationship, and positive emotion. The chapter concludes by identifying the particular ways that SCE’s innovation worked within the existing system (e.g. adding new initiatives and realigning old ideas to harness and utilize them in novel ways) and by considering the implications of this particular type of change and its arrangements for the subsequent development of the school’s innovation and its long-term sustainability.

The Self-initiated change occurred accidentally

South Castle Elementary School (SCE) is the oldest school in its school district and was originally founded in 1902. Until a few decades ago, more than 100 students
attended SCE. However, since 1991, the school has seen its enrollment decrease as people left the park area to pursue jobs and better education. Therefore, the school district decided to close the school by 2001 (Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Kang & Cho, 2010)\(^3\).

On a summer day in 2000, a book club for adults who were interested in children’s books and literature had a two-day gathering at SCE. They chose SCE as the venue for its historical background and beautiful landscape. During the meeting, they accidentally heard about the school’s imminent closing from its principal. Saddened by the plan to close such a beautiful and historical school, the leader of the group, who had also had been involved in civil activism in the region for many years\(^4\), suggested working to save the school to the members of the book club and to the principal and the idea took hold.

The parents of SCE students and community members felt sorry for the destiny of their beloved school, but did not think that there was anything they could do to prevent the imminent closure (Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Kang & Cho, 2010). However, even though they agreed to work to save SCE, they did not yet have a clear vision or knowledge of how to put their plan into practice. Thus, to secure help, the group leader approached a teacher, Mr. Kang - then a full-time director of the regional chapter of the Korean Teachers & Education Workers’ Union (KTU-Jeon-gyo-jo) - whom she had met during local campaigns for better education and living (Kang, 2008; Rhyu, 2003, 2008: Lee &

\(^3\) From 1982 to 2006, the Korean government forced 5,305 small rural schools like SCE to close or merge with neighboring schools (Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2006).

\(^4\) The leader was later elected city council member in the neighboring city.
Chon, 2010). She asked him to participate in the project to save the school. The two agreed to pursue the idea of saving SCE. Mr. Kang invited another teacher, Mr. Rhyu, who was then the head of the committee for “Authentic Teaching (Cham-gyo-yuk)” in the regional chapter of KTU. The book club leader’s initiative, the arrival of the activist teachers, and the presence of a principal who wanted to save his school represented the first steps in an attempt to change SCE. The source of SIC was therefore a serendipitous opportunity seized by the change agents (the two activist teachers) along with unexpected allies. As Reay et al. (2006) poignantly put it, once the change agents recognized the momentum for change, they “turned an institutional wrinkle into a significant tear in the institutional fabric” (Reay et al., 2006: 994). Such an opening was not sufficient to generate SIC, however. The school change agents still needed to capitalize on the opportunities (Binder, 2002; Grossman, 2009). The change agents used their strong working knowledge of their organizational and institutional contexts to determine what actions to take, as well as the appropriate time and place to take action (Reay et al., 2006).

In the next section, I provide more detailed accounts of the key change agents, the activist teachers and the founding principal, and their strategies during the early stage.

**The old guard: two activist teachers**

SCE’s innovation was initially triggered by the school closing crisis. But the crisis alone might have not guaranteed school innovation. SCE might have been closed like many other schools. It might have survived a little longer as a conventional school. The
key to SCE’s innovation was two seasoned activist teachers\(^5\) (Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang\(^6\)), whom I call the old guard, who led the change process from the beginning.

The old guard overcame the formidable challenge of accomplishing grassroots SIC into through their persistence; temporal intelligence of good timing, sequence, and pacing; deep understanding of the school system in South Korea; and distinct leadership skills for mobilizing constituents (Kang, 2009; Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Seo, 2004; See also Huy, 2001; Meyer & Kretschmer, 2007; Reay et al., 2006).

The old guard had acquired their identities and skills through their prior experience of engaging in the educational movement for democratic education in South Korea for more than twenty years. Since the 1980s, many progressive Korean teachers struggled to dismantle the authoritarian, bureaucratic and militaristic culture of control in the Korean educational system. These characteristics of Korean education were the lingering legacy of Japanese colonialism and a series of military dictatorships (Kim, 2005; KTU, 2006). These reform efforts produced powerful and significant social movements in Korea during the 1980s and 1990s (Kang, 2002; Synott, 2001). In 1989, the movement declared itself a Union- *Chunkyojo*, the Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union (KTU). The authoritarian government repressed this movement, resulting in the imprisonment of several teacher activists, the dismissal of about 1,700 teachers, mass

---

\(^5\) An activist is defined as “someone who tries to advance a substantive political or social goal or outcome. Activism is always an attempt to exercise power, yet some activists’ motivations are highly altruistic. They try to develop and employ power for ethical ends” (Levine, 2007: 1; See also, Sachs, 2002). Hargreaves and Fink define activist teachers as “change agents committed to social and educational missions that unite them in confronting bureaucratic and political obstacles to socially just and educationally justifiable improvement and reform” (2005: 132).

\(^6\) They were regarded as the “founding parents” of SCE’s innovation.
rallies and intense public debates (Synott, 2001). As committed members of the KTU and dedicated teachers activists, both teachers had therefore fought against the authoritarian and bureaucratic Korean school system (Kang & Cho, 2010).

In spite of significant democratic progress, for the most part South Korean society still remained an unfriendly environment for teacher activism (Kang, 2002; Kim, 2007; Synott, 2001). While many teacher activists tended to avoid identifying themselves as such due to the fear of repression or any possibility of disadvantage, the two teachers were eager to identify themselves as activists. Mr. Rhyu was such a dedicated teacher activist that he even held his wedding ceremony on his school’s playground with students and teachers in attendance (Kang & Cho, 2010). During the interview, Mr. Rhyu recalled his activism,

“When I was a novice teacher, I was such a radical, even reckless, teacher activist that I conducted one-man sit-down strikes against undemocratic school policies at the school district office… I was even elected as one of the youngest chairpersons of a local chapter of the KTU when I was in my only twenties thanks to my unyielding radicalism. When many teacher activists in the local chapter of the KTU had to leave their schools due to the government’s repression in the late 1980’s, I, together with other teachers who managed to maintain our jobs, gave all our salaries to those teachers who lost their jobs to help them weather the difficult time together for many years.”

Before he joined SCE in 2000, Mr. Rhyu served as a chairperson of the Gyeonggi regional KTU committee of genuine-education practices. Teachers worked together in this committee to develop extra-curricular and instructional materials that sought to enhance “authentic learning” or critical consciousness and democratic learning (Kang & Cho, 2010; Small School Network, 2009).
The other activist teacher, Mr. Kang, had also been involved in the KTU for more than twenty years. During the interview he recalled the reason why he joined the KTU and engaged in educational movements,

“One day when I was a novice teacher in my twenties, I stood up in opposition to the principal’s embezzlement from the school. Under the authoritarian school atmosphere in late 1970s, my action was regarded as so defiant that it might have risked my job. After this event, I was stigmatized as a hard core activist teacher in the school district. As a result, I was repeatedly placed in the most disadvantaged school in the district.”

(Mr. Kang, teacher)

Mr. Kang said that the bitter experience of unfairness in the education system led him to become involved in educational movements by joining the KTU. He was a committed member of the KTU. When he was a chairperson of a local branch of the KTU in the early 1990s, he used his own house as a venue for union activities and bore the operational costs out of his own pay. A teacher founding member of SCE Mr. Han said,

“I was deeply impressed by Mr. Kang’s sincerity and devotion. It was the positive experience of working with Mr. Kang that caused me to decide to join SCE.”

Mr. Kang always emphasized the importance of teacher’s work ethic and attitude over teaching skills or knowledge. Mr. Han vividly remembered Mr. Kang’s motto when they worked together for educational movement in a local chapter: “The most important thing for a teacher to do is to arrive at school as early as possible, no matter whether they have good teaching skills or not.” According to Mr. Han,

---

7 In South Korea, public school teachers are regularly transferred to other schools within the school district every four years due to a policy of teacher rotation. In recent years, principals in regular schools are granted discretion to invite up to the 20 percent of teaching staff (50% in publicly innovative schools and public autonomous schools)
“Mr. Kang was always the first one to arrive at school. His diligence inspired many colleague teachers and even compensated for his moderately poor classroom management and instructional skills.”

On July 1, 1999, after a decade of struggles, KTU finally became a legalized union with 62,000 members (KTU, 2006). In recent years, however, the public ceased to view KTU as a social movement of teachers devoted to the ideals of democratic education with a passion for genuine education. Instead, it now viewed KTU as an “interest group” which confined its efforts primarily to enforcing contracts and protecting member interests (KTU, 2006; Voss & Sherman, 2000). On the other hand, its dogmatic adherence to radical strategies including rebellious and illegitimate actions had estranged KTU from many teachers. Even Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang, KTU’s longstanding loyal members, grew increasingly disenfranchised by the conservative transformation of the KTU and its dogmatic strategies. Mr. Rhyu said,

“I grew frustrated with the KTU and became tired of fighting alone against the seemingly never-changing authoritarian bureaucratic schools without any realistic support from the KTU... Disillusioned, I intentionally distanced myself from KTU and began to wander around small schools in rural areas.”

“I did this because of a somewhat romantic and nostalgic feeling that I cherished since I was a novice teacher. I always longed for becoming a teacher of a small school in an islet. I always longed for a somewhat utopian school community in which I could devote myself solely to children’s education with a small group of like-minded colleagues and parents.”

But Mr. Rhyu found that rural schools were more bureaucratic than large urban schools. He felt as if “he were a floating weed that never felt belonged and settled without roots, precariously wandering from one school to another” (Kang & Chon, 2010: 20). In 1999, he said that he felt so tired that he finally decided to quit his job altogether.
and was preparing to leave for the United Kingdom to study alternative education (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2009). Meanwhile, around that time, Mr. Kang was a managing director of educational policy at KTU Gyeonggi regional office. He said that he was trying to find a way to revitalize the moribund KTU.

Traditionally, educational movement and activism has been pursued in schools and educational fields through unions. In SCE, however, the old guard attempted change without the guidance and safety net of a union (Scully & Segal, 2002). Instead, the activist teachers tried to keep a distance from the union to pursue an alternative way of change. This attitude helped them exploit an opening in an unexpected way. In 2000, both teachers encountered the possibility of transforming schools at SCE. Mr. Rhyu recalled the moment he heard about the plan to save the school. He said,

“My heart almost stopped when I heard the principal’s plan to save SCE. The plan provided a glimpse into the possibility of building a democratic community-like school that I had been dreaming of. It was a sort of a sense of déjà vu. I felt as if I had already experienced the situation, even though I was only imagining it in my mind.”

Central to grasping the opportunity to innovate the school was the teachers’ experience and knowledge of assessing the timing for action (Huy, 2001; Pierson, 2004; Reay et al., 2006). The teachers’ political awareness, social skills, organizing experience, and temporal intelligence enabled them to advance their change initiative once they encountered a window of opportunity (Huy, 2001; Reay et al., 2006).

In promoting SCE’s change, to a certain extent Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu were opposites. While Mr. Kang was tenacious and determined, Mr. Rhyu was more cautious,
soft and subtle\textsuperscript{8}. Mr. Kang was a rather typical activist. He was eager to challenge those who opposed the espoused goals and purposes of the school change. He emphasized the importance of building a power base by forging allies, networks, solidarity and coalitions (Bolman & Deal, 2006; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). For example, he always confronted assistant principals who tended to block change in an aggressive manner and sometimes challenged the founding principal when he hesitated to refuse unreasonable paperwork and ceremonial events (e.g. sporting events and art competitions) that were imposed by the school districts. During the interview, he elaborated his view on good leadership.

“I think a leader’s job is to mobilize the power and resources needed to advocate and fight for the organization’s mission. If necessary, a leader should welcome a battle rather than avoiding it” (Mr. Kang, teacher).

His relentless leadership enabled SCE to surmount direct and indirect resistance to change and other constraints and to carve out space for the school innovation. In other words, he was the driving force for SCE’s change during the early stage. Conversely, although Mr. Rhyu also held activist dispositions, he was more equipped with the skills of motivating and inspiring allies and followers. He cared deeply about the feelings of parents and teachers and paid personalized attention to their needs (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Seo, 2004). Thus, he was a “principled” or “tempered” activist\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{8} Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang were nicknamed by parents a “prudent housewife (살림꾼; sal-lim-\textsuperscript{ggun})” and a “warrior commander (돌격대장; dol-gyeok-\textsuperscript{dae-jang})."

\textsuperscript{9} A reporter of a Korean educational journal characterized Mr. Rhyu’s distinct activist style as a “revolutionary with serenely translucent eyes (눈 맑은 혁명가: Nun-Mal-geun-Hyeok-Myeong-Ga) (Lee, 2007).”
(Bolman & Deal, 2006; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Mr. Rhyu got along with parents and teachers and even with the principal and assistant principals. He went out to restaurants, bars, and karaoke, and played cards together with parents and teachers. While Mr. Kang was straightforward and did not socialize, Mr. Rhyu was everyone’s buddy. He had great people skills. His social skills and relationship with SCE’s members allowed him to acquire trust and influence.

Although their strategies and styles were substantially different, Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu still shared an unshakeable faith in their activist worldviews and moral purpose for social justice. Mr. Rhyu said,

“Even though Mr. Kang and I had several disagreements in terms of disposition and strategy, overall, we were a good team. We both knew each other’s weakness and strengths well. We need each other. For example, Mr. Kang always complemented my shortcomings of avoiding confrontations and irresoluteness. Of course, we did clash quite a few times over the course of the school change, but we knew how to avoid crossing the line…”

However, while Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu’s co-leadership offered complementary benefits to SCE, it remains to be seen how their collective leadership evolved over time (Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

*The founding principal*

During the interviews, many people stated that it was Principal Lee’s leadership that enabled SCE’s innovation to happen. Principal Lee was a beginning principal at the initiation of the school change. SCE was his first school as principal. He said that he was
a “laid-back” principal with moderate qualifications (Hallett, 2006; See also, Gouldner, 1954; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). He stated that,

“I was the second-to-last candidate in my principal training program. Thus, it was “fair” that I was assigned to a school like SCE in an isolated mountainous rural area which was scheduled to be closed soon.”

Schools like SCE were the least desirable places for principals to expect to be assigned. Principal Lee said,

“When I arrived at SCE, I was frustrated. I saw the dilapidated school. I thought to myself that I will leave this school as soon as I can in two years. However, since SCE was my first school to run as a principal, I gradually became attached to it.”

As he became attached to the school, Mr. Lee began to feel sorry about its closure. However, despite his regrets, Principal Lee could not imagine any alternative. Until the idea of saving the school arose during the book club meeting in 2000, he did not realize the possibility of keeping the school open. Once he recognized this possibility, he became so committed that he toured the neighboring schools to attract parents and students (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009) - an unconventional move considering the bureaucratic atmosphere of the South Korean school system. Furthermore, Mr. Lee was eager to distribute his power to the activist teachers because he believed that it would help save the school (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009). Considering that many other principals in South Korea behave as if they are “little emperors” in their schools,
Principal Lee’s decision to release his power to the teachers was difficult and unusual (See also Walker, 2004; Cheng, 2008)\textsuperscript{10}.

The principal and the old guard were an unlikely coalition. Before they began to work together to save SCE, the activist teachers and the principal discussed the daunting tasks associated with the plan that Principal Lee had to undertake. The activist teacher recalled,

“\textquote{I was concerned about the principal. So, I asked him \textquote{would it be really okay with you to choose this unconventional direction for SCE?}’’ Principal Lee answered to me, by quoting Deng Xiaoping’s famous words, \textquote{It doesn’t matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice.’’}’’ (Mr. Rhyu, teacher; See also, Kang & Cho, 2010).

During an interview, Principal Lee told me about his thoughts on leadership.

Paul Chung: Would you please talk about your leadership with regard to the SCE’s innovation?
Principal Lee: Thanks to the stimulation of the book club’s leader, I came up with the idea of saving SCE from the beginning. I invited the activist teachers to SCE in the first place. After conducting interviews with them, we agreed to work together to save SCE.
Paul Chung: I encountered some accounts that said that it was the other way around.
Principal Lee: I knew that some people regarded me as a ‘robot’ principal. That perception is both correct and incorrect. Yes, I deliberately tried to appear passive and often remained in the back seat in order to provide the teachers with opportunities to develop their leadership skills by allowing them to actually run the school\textsuperscript{11}. Metaphorically speaking, this perception was wrong because the activist teachers were like fish swimming in the

\textsuperscript{10} Due to the historical legacy of Confucianism, principals who are regarded as the flowers of teachers tend to be highly respected in South Korean society and therefore most South Korean teachers aspire to become principals (Kim & Kim, 2004).

\textsuperscript{11} Principal Lee often portrayed himself as \textquote{Mong-Gye} (Mong-Gye: the acronym of \textquote{Mong} (stupid) and \textquote{Gye} (idle’’). By doing so, he conveyed a two-fold meaning: (1) Descriptively, he was an “incomplete” (Ancona, et al., 2007) and humble leader; (2) Normatively, he deliberately delegated his authority to the teachers (although he was not incompetent) so that he could provide them opportunities to build their leadership capacity.
net that I had thrown down. When they became too radical and extreme, as you can imagine, I tried to moderate their demands. When they struggled with tough issues, such as resolving conflicts between teachers and parents, I stepped in to resolve them. This doesn’t mean that I underestimate these teachers’ knowledge and experience at all, I don’t. I respect the teachers with all my heart. Without them, nothing would have been possible here. What I’m saying is that we trusted each other and worked together.

Although it is not yet possible to clearly identify what factors made Principal Lee exercise such unconventional leadership, many teachers and parents repeatedly stated that it was the Principal Lee’s sacrifice that made it easier to carve out space for innovation and sustain it over time despite considerable pressures and constraints (See also, Rhyu, 2009; Kang, 2009; Kang & Cho, 2010).

While appreciating Principal Lee’s virtues of “releasing” leadership (Gouldner, 1955; Hallett, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), Mr. Rhyu also viewed Principal Lee as someone who was not particularly prepared to run an innovative school like SCE. He viewed Principal Lee as a vulnerable or fragile leader (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004).

“Principal Lee is someone who has never belonged to the “major league” of principals. Principal Lee’s ill feelings against the mainstream principal clique allowed him to take the unconventional action of allowing SCE’s innovation to occur…Do you know what Principal Lee is most afraid of? He is afraid of being ignored by teachers and parents” (Mr. Rhyu, teacher; See also, Battilana et al., 2010; Seo & Creed, 2002)

Accordingly, Mr. Rhyu tried to provide the principal with emotional assurance that he was the formal authority of SCE. In order to assure him, Mr. Rhyu said that he always tried to address to the principal with a respectful attitude. He said that he tried to let

---

12 I received this insight from a dialogue with Professor G.W. Seo who also conducted qualitative study about SCE from 2000-2003.
Principal Lee have the final say concerning most decisions and to “give” face” to the principal, allowing him to salvage a favorable representation of self in front of subordinate teachers and parents (Hallett, 2007). Mr. Rhyu said that,

“When there were disagreements between the principal and teachers, I used subtle and soft approaches. Instead of confronting the principal like Mr. Kang, I always retreated from the conflicting scenes and yielded to achieve a compromise.”

In addition, he said that he tried to convince the principal that his democratic leadership style was really necessary to a school like innovative SCE (Fullan, 2001; Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2009). This way, Mr. Rhyu could safeguard his mutual trust and cooperation with Principal Lee. With regard to this emotional management, Mr. Rhyu stated that,

“I think that I have built in antennae. Whenever a conflict arises, my feelers automatically detect it so that I can approach the sufferers and resolve the tension. That’s pretty much what I do at this school with Principal Lee, other teachers and parents.

Mr. Rhyu stated that he saw himself as a kind of “mutant” activist in the sense that he cared a lot about emotions, feelings and relationships rather than just focusing on “cool” rational causes. Mr. Rhyu said that,

“I think that my disposition was somewhat heretical in the world of activists in which rationality and logic are highly valued while trivializing emotion (See also, Hochschild, 1983; Hargreaves, 2000, 2001, 2003).

In this sense, Mr. Rhyu was what Meyerson and Scully (1995) called a tempered radical who understands that it is pointless to view supporters of the status quo as enemies and that it is essential to gain the support of those who maintain the majority perspective.

Furthermore, given the importance SCE placed on delimiting bureaucratic arrangements
and positional authority, Principal Lee’s “hands-off” leadership was regarded as an invaluable asset in the early years. However, it remains to be seen if this distinct form of leadership can surmount the more daunting challenges of implementing and sustaining SIC over time (Collins, 2001; Huerta, 2002; Harris et al., 2007). Furthermore, it remains to be seen whether collective leadership becomes more fragile due to divergent interests of the founding principal and the activist teachers, or whether it becomes more firmly solidified over time thanks to their complementary effects (Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Thelen & Streeck, 2005).

**Lingering tensions between the old guard and the assistant principals**

During the early stage of SCE’s innovation, although Principal Lee voluntarily relinquished his leadership to the activist teachers and the parents, the founding teachers still had to deal with conflicts with resistant assistant principals. While the activist teachers sought to weaken bureaucratic arrangements, the assistant principals tried to be gatekeepers of the status quo (Kang & Cho, 2010; Seo, 2004). Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang said that they did not even try to negotiate with the assistant principals in the beginning. Instead, the activist teachers recalled that they sometimes ignored the hierarchical authority of the assistant principals or confronted them as if they had engaged in protests and campaigns against the school district authority. However, as the new innovative arrangement of SCE became more settled, the activist teachers and the newly assigned assistant principals learned to avoid confrontation and live together despite their differences.
In addition, the founding teachers also had to address conflicts with other teachers who did not agree with them. They had conflicts with teachers who transferred to SCE in order to advance their careers. According to Mr. Rhyu, the relationship between the activist teachers and these teachers who sought career advancement was like “oil and water.” The activist teachers said that they tried to maintain working relation with these teachers and treated them with respect as colleagues. But conflicts inevitably arose between these conservative teachers and the founding parents who did not appreciate their teaching styles and methods. In order to address this issue, the activist teachers and the principal persuaded these teachers to opt for early transfers. In the early stage, SCE had suffered a negative reputation of being a nest of KTU activist teachers among educators and schools in the neighboring area who had an uneasy relationship with the assistant principals and these promotion aspiring teachers.

Pulling together a guiding team of teachers and parents

Once the goal of saving SCE was set by the core members, then the next task was to pull together a guiding team of teachers and parents with the needed skills, credibility, connections, and authority to move things along.

Teachers

---

13 The South Korean school authority gives incentives for promotion to teachers who work in rural areas to encourage teachers to work in disadvantaged areas. Since the competition to become principals is so fierce among aspiring applicants in South Korea, teachers are eager to put up with working in rural schools in order to obtain an advantage. However, like bad money driving out good, many small rural schools are staffed with teachers seeking a promotion, which contributes to an even more bureaucratic culture in the rural schools.
At the start, the recruitment of teachers was based on social networks. Mr. Rhyu used his established relationships to recruit other teacher members. He recruited other teachers based on his acquaintance with them while he worked as the head of the “authentic teaching” committee in Gyeonggi province. Those teachers were mostly friends of Mr. Rhyu’s. They were not typical activist teachers like Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu. Rather, they were “purist” or “authentic” teachers who were dedicated to teaching above anything else. Unlike their activist counterparts, they had engaged in teachers’ networks for professional development or curriculum studies outside their own schools instead of confronting their principals and unsupportive school systems. During the interviews, these teachers stated that they joined the SCE’s innovative project because of negative experiences with bureaucratic principals and teachers in the conventional large schools who were more interested in their own promotion at the expense of children and because of dissatisfaction with the current public school systems.

Mr. Rhyu had a somewhat ambivalent opinion about the teachers. On the one hand, he thought that they were “conscientious” teachers genuinely committed to teaching/learning and their students. On the other hand, he viewed them as somewhat politically naïve in terms of experience and knowledge about educational systems and educational organizing.

“I think they are “conscientious” or “authentic” teachers. However, since they had little experience of seriously engaging in educational movements, they have an insufficient understanding about the complexities of changing schools. Although the morality and authenticity of individuals matter, the work of creating and sustaining school change is way beyond the capacity of individual’s morality and authenticity.”
Even though the activist teachers and the other teachers had been drawn to SCE because of the shared mission of transforming the schools, they agreed on the plan to save the school for different, even contradictory, reasons. For example, while the activist teachers emphasized the moral purpose of building a democratic and community-like school to infiltrate the entrenched bureaucratic school system, the “authentic” teachers were more interested in cultivating a school in which teachers could fully devote themselves to teaching without any distractions not intrinsically related to instructional needs. Moreover, while the activist teachers attempted to make ambitious and comprehensive change projects to achieve larger successes, the “authentic” teachers wanted to pursue narrower projects, such as curriculum development and instructional innovation, which were within the scope of their abilities to carry them out.

The multifaceted interpretation of SCE’s innovation contributed to the mobilizing of teachers because it made them choose to participate in the school innovation project without clearly recognizing what specific changes might be involved (Pierson, 2004; Sarason & Doris, 1979). However, this lack of clarity about the goals and directions of the change also grew more visible over time and sowed seeds for ongoing disputes over the meaning of and strategies for change (Rhyu, 2009).

Parents

Many parents chose to move their families from adjacent cities to SCE’s mountainous neighborhood, causing student enrollment to rise from 26 to more than 120 students. Frustrated with bureaucratic and impersonal large schools in cities where they...
felt that their children had been trapped and treated unfairly, these parents desperately wanted to find a more nurturing and attentive learning environment in which students would be well cared for and have their individual needs met (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2009; The Small School Network, 2009). According to Mr. Rhyu, the founding parents of SCE could be divided into three groups. Some parents (mostly college educated) from nearby cities who were concerned that their children would not fit into traditional bureaucratic schools, withdrew their children and transferred them to this somewhat progressive school (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Seo, 2004). Other parents with somewhat bohemian dispositions, such as artists and writers, were interested in child-centered education and community. A third group of parents with experiences of engaging in democratic and civil movements were attracted by a dislike of all forms of hierarchy (Kang & Cho, 2010).  

The beautiful natural landscape of SCE’s neighborhood served as an additional attraction to parents who wanted to escape the dreary city life and let their children play.

---

14 In the Korean context, although no official policy of school choice exists at the elementary school level, parents do choose, either by sending their children to private schools or by moving to the neighborhood of their desired schools. (See also, Agnes Van Zanten, 2001)

15 However, according to the interviews with the founding members, some of these parents who did not actually live in the castle area used fake addresses to get accepted to SCE with tacit consent of the principal and the headman of the castle village during the particularly early stage (Mr. Rhyu, teacher). This was possible on a provisional basis in the early stage because of a lack of effective regulation and of tolerance of some forms of bypassing legal restrictions on the part of school district and local district authorities (See also, Van Zanten, 2001). Although this strategy was a successful strategy to quickly increase student enrollment, it subsequently became a source of many troubles, conflicts, and dilemma among the parents (Ball et al, 2007). I will return to this issue in detail in chapter 5.
in the bosom of Mother Nature (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009). These parents believed that self-development, freedom, and morality were much more important than higher test scores or the mastery of subject matter. However, it was a never easy decision for parents to move to this isolated mountainous SCE area just for their children’s education, leaving behind the convenient life of the city. They had to endure terrible living conditions and poorly maintained homes without heating systems, running water, or electricity. In addition, some parents had to commute more than three to four hours every day and other families had to live apart due to the long commutes. Above all else, it took courage for parents to make the decision to experiment with their children’s future in a start-up experimental school. A mother of a student said that,

“When I told my neighbors that I was sending my son to SCE, they asked me “Are you crazy? Why do you want to make your child a guinea pig at an unproven school? If you do that, you are a wicked Mom who would make your son an offering to the school!”” (Eunarae’s mother)

Another mother said that when she told her husband that she wanted to send their children to SCE, her husband said to her:

---

16 The environment of a school like SCE in which there were no nearby private institutions was mostly likely regarded as a fatal shortcoming by most parents. In South Korea, more than seventy percent of elementary and secondary school students in cities engage in diverse forms of private tutoring (e.g. cram schools, private language institutes, and one-on-one tutoring (Kim, 2004; Lee, 2003; See also Bray, 1999). Indeed, the lack of (private) educational resources is one of the major reasons that rural residents leave their hometowns; Many residents in these areas move to adjacent cities in search of private institutes for their children. In SCE, however, this “fatal” defect became an asset to the founding members who had the conviction that nature plays an important role in children’s character building and who recognized the detrimental effects of private tutoring.
“If you really want to send our children to that school, you’d better divorce me first. Then, you can go wherever you want!” (A-Reum’s mother).

Parents were willing to take the risk of moving to SCE’s neighborhood despite the inconvenience because they so desired a good school for their children. While the SCE’s innovation invoked new hope and possibilities, it also involved uncertainty, high risks and costs, especially in the early stages (Fullan, 2001). As House (1974) suggests,

“The personal cost of trying new innovation is often high and seldom there is any indication that innovations are worth the investment. Innovations are act of faith. They require that one believe that they will ultimately bear fruit and be worth the personal investment, often without the hope of immediate return. Costs are high.” (p. 74; cited from Fullan, 2001).

As a result, if the founders were to successfully launch the SIC, it was particularly important to reassure the nervous participants while convincing them of the meaning of the change in the early stage (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2004). In other words, in the ambiguous and uncertain setting of school innovation under risk, the change agents can have more chance of successful initiation when they explicitly take meaning and emotion into account together.

_Cultivating the meaning of change: Invoking the imagery of a small-scale social movement (micro mobilization)_

Ultimately the transformation of subjective realities and meanings is the essence of change (Fullan, 2001). However, these meanings are rarely clear at the outset (Fullan,

---

17 The traditional Chinese four-character idiom 孟母三遷 (명모 삼천; _Maeng Mo Sam Cheon_; literal translation: Mencius’ mother, three moves) refers to the legend that Mencius’ mother moved their house three times—first she moved their house next to a cemetery, next she moved them next to a market and finally she moved them next to a school—before finding a location that she felt was suitable for his upbringing. This idiom refers to the importance of a proper environment for the upbringing of children.
During the early stage, after many meetings, the organizing committee consisting of the founding teachers, principal and parents concluded that they could save the school only by transforming it into an innovative school with a new vision, new curriculum, and a new way of schooling (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2009). However, although the founding teacher activists had been involved in educational movements for many years, they had no prior experience and knowledge of actually transforming a reform at a school level. As a consequence, they struggled to design a new innovative school model and come up with a common set of clear principles or guidelines for change (Rhyu, 2009; Fullan, 2001; McQuillan, 2009; Zbaracki, 1998). The old guard envisioned a new form of more principled professionalism where teachers engage with parents in relationships of reciprocal learning that are more open, interactive and inclusive in character (Hargreaves, 2000). Mr. Rhyu said that,

“At the beginning, these new relationships were conceived in contrast to the bureaucratic features of conventional large schools and were directed more at reversing or altering old bureaucratic practices than pursuing clearly articulated relationships.”

As a remedy or solution to the problems of bureaucratic schooling, the founding members sought a school innovation aimed at making SCE more democratic and responsive to school community members’ expectations and demands by enhancing their genuine participation in school decision making. The idea of enhancing participation in school governance in South Korea was hardly new. In fact, it has been one of the recurring themes in administrative reform as well as in more general reform efforts. The Korean national government implemented parent participation in school board policy in 1990 (Kim, 2004). But many teachers and parents regarded the implementation of those
policies as just “cosmetic committees” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1998), limiting parents’ roles to the sidelines. The founding parents and teachers worked hard to correct this superficial form of participation. In carrying out these goals, the activist teachers said,

“We tried to avoid any form of power differences between teachers and parents or between principal and teachers, otherwise, even here at our school, we might end up reproducing alienating and inhumane bureaucratic relationships” (Mr. Kang, teacher).

During the interviews, a parent stated

“The hallmark of SCE was the fact that, here, almost all the decisions were sought to be reached by consensus” (Chong-Hyun’s mother).

Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang stated that they sought to build a truly democratic and community-like school through adopting the practices of direct democracy and self governance. They also wished to practice participatory democracy as a model of interaction between teachers and parents. They were unwilling to formalize many aspects of the relationship between teachers and parents because, they believed, doing so would seem at odds with the determinedly informal, voluntary, and personal character of SCE” (Mr. Kang & Mr. Rhyu, teachers; See also, Polletta, 2002). Thus, they said that they relied more on ad-hoc or informal (person-to-person) ways of decision making rather than rigid and formal bureaucratic procedures. In this way, in cultivating the meaning of school change, the old guard invoked the imagery of social movements. They frequently referred to the “grass-roots” nature of their initiatives. They tended to conceptualize their endeavors of transforming the school into a more democratic and communal one as a part
of a grass-roots or localized form of collective action or “cultural movement”\(^\text{18}\) that directly and indirectly challenged the existing bases of hierarchical and bureaucratic school authority (Armstrong, 2002; Huerta, 2002; Chen & O’Mahony, 2009).

The old guard emphasized that the grassroots was the necessary and legitimate source of change efforts. The image of social movements enabled the old guard and the founding parents to make sense of their situation in new terms and see greater possibilities for change that connected them to more inspiring and inclusive visions of social justice that bring people together in a spirit of equity and solidarity. This shift from individual to systemic attributions is characteristic of small-scale social movements or micro-mobilization, which draw on passion and moral purpose to initiate and sustain their commitment through enduring activism (Scully & Segal, 2002). This resonates with the Hargreaves’ (2000) claim,

> “It is now vital that the teaching profession works in partnership with the public, to become a vigorous social movement (Touraine, 1995) of acting subjects who work together to improve the quality and the professionalism of teaching, rather than a set of fragmented individuals who act as clients only in their families’ private interests” (p. 227).

This vision of building a democratic and caring school community was very appealing to the parents and apparently worked well in the earlier stage (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Seo, 2004). It was relatively easy for a small self-selected group who wanted a democratic and caring school to pursue goals that fit their interests even in the absence of substantive structural change during the early stage (Armstrong, 2002; \(^\text{18}\) Emphasizing the important role of culture in transforming schools, Mr. Rhyu claimed that what he was doing at SCE was a form of “cultural movement.” This will be discussed in more detail at the later section of this chapter (See also Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008).
Hargreaves & Fullan, 2006; Huerta, 2002). In other words, the like-minded participants found it relatively easy to pursue the task of reculturing that was required to achieve SIC. Furthermore, parent participation made it possible for SCE to endure challenging times. The parents were committed to the transformation of SCE along lines that they desired and were thus actively involved in all sorts of school activities. They made a real effort to provide support any way they could.

When the founding parents and teachers arrived at SCE in the Spring of 2001, they found that SCE’s building and facilities looked much like a “haunted house”\(^\text{19}\). The school had been poorly maintained because it was going to be closed. In the early years of school innovation, the founding parents and teachers voluntarily fixed the run-down school buildings and facilities, painted the walls, repaired the faucets in bathrooms, and polished the wooden classroom floors to help rebuild the school facilities. I also heard many parents say that they regarded SCE as their own school. Their investment and efforts were such that their ownership of the school was dramatically different from that of their counterparts in conventional schools. Polletta (2002) argues,

“It might be almost impossible to transform an organization where routes to success are uncertain, where there are scant means for ensuring members’ compliance, and where members had few resources into a new innovative one without garnering the support of the constituents” (p. 14).

In addition, since the parents perceived that SCE was a fragile organization that could easily be destroyed by external pressure from the school district (Wicks, 2001), they recognized that they had to remain actively involved so that the school could survive.

\(^{19}\) The founding Parents and teachers figuratively depicted the dilapidated condition of the SCE as a “haunted house on the mountain (귀곡산장; Gwui-Gok-San-Jang)”
and succeed (Huerta, 2002). This recognition of SCE’s vulnerability and “sense of urgency” (Kotter, 2008) reinforced their participation and support (Huy & Zott, in press).

**Cultivating positive emotions for change**

In addition to cultivating the meaning of change by engaging with the parents, the activist teachers were also keenly aware of the crucial roles of emotions in creating change. As Fullan (2001) suggests, change agents must provide their members with a sense of stability and security while still heightening the sense of urgency (Kotter, 2008). The members must have a sense that the organization and its leadership are stable and capable before they are willing to enlist in the battle for change (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Huy and Zott, 2007). Two types of emotional strategies helped launch the young innovative school: (1) emphasizing the integrity of SCE; (2) emphasizing the moral purpose and capacity of the founding teachers.

Founding teachers could influence parents and teachers’ emotions about SCE in ways that suggest integrity in several ways. The founding teachers sought to develop passion and enthusiasm for the change among parents and teachers. For example, Mr. Rhyu tried to promote these feelings by engaging in group meetings with parents and posting articles on the school’s web-site, newspapers, and education magazines. Mr. Rhyu’s enthusiasm was contagious. His deliberate publicity was vital to securing parents’ participation and support. Mr. Yoon confirmed that Mr. Rhyu had been regarded as “a master at igniting a burning flame for change” through his eloquence and inspirational writing skill among many KTU educators. The activist teachers also influenced parents’ and teachers’ feelings by emphasizing the vulnerability of SCE, thus heightening the
sense of urgency (Kotter, 2008). These activist teachers did not give stakeholders a feeling of false security by portraying the school as a robust or unshakeable organization, as is often the case with organizations in a vulnerable stage (Fullan, 2001, 2007, 2009; Huy, 2001; Huy & Zott, in press), but they emphasized the fragility of their new organization.

“SCE is a very fragile school. It is so vulnerable that a single blow would shatter it to pieces.” (Mr. Rhyu, teacher)

“In the early days, Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang always said to the parents that “SCE will certainly die without your support!”” (Chong-Hyun’s mother).

These recognitions of the vulnerability of their organization fueled and sustained parents’ and teachers’ commitment to SCE, enhancing the integrity of the school.

As Mr. Woo said,

“The more we felt intimidated by the school district and other schools, the greater we felt that we’re doing the right thing.”

Another way of enhancing the parents’ and teachers’ positive emotions was through stressing the integrity of the founder teachers (the activist teachers in particular), and their moral purpose underpinning the SCE’s change (Fullan, 2005). For example, Mr. Rhyu repeatedly emphasized the moral purpose and social justice activism of his involvement in SCE. He rhetorically said that,

“A farmer who sows an apple seed should not expect to enjoy the fruit. If he does, his good intention will quickly disappear; people will even be suspicious of his good intentions. All of his efforts will end in vain.”

Mr. Rhyu convinced the parents and teachers (and probably himself as well) that he would not get any rewards from his efforts and from the successful innovation at SCE. Mr. Kang also conveyed his altruism and benevolence. He stated that he would not seek
to stay at SCE after his assigned years so that he could spread the innovative model elsewhere (Seo, 2004; Kang, 2005). One day he asked me,

“Have you read Gilles Deleuze’s (2004) *Thousand Plateaus*? I’m studying it now with my teacher network members. It’s a really fascinating and insightful book. You should read it! As the book suggests, I would prefer to live like a nomad who travels from place to place rather than staying in one place all the time. In this fast changing, neo-liberalism driven world, we need to be nomads who are always on the move rather than settlers who are content with the status quo!” (Mr. Kang, teacher).

In sum, the two activist teachers’ emotional management strategies calmed nervous and worried parents, teachers, and the principal and reinvigorated much-needed support for the young and fragile organization.

*Cultivating collaborative relationship*

The activist teachers, particularly Mr. Rhyu, were also keenly aware of the crucial roles of relationships in initiating and leading change in challenging circumstances (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Harris, 2006). In order to promote supportive relationships with parents, they tried to make themselves available to them and worked relentlessly. The old guard knew how to get parents and communities on their side and fight the inflexible bureaucracies that held them back (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Harris, 2006). For example, the two activist teachers literally lived at SCE (Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Kang & Cho, 2010). They worked twelve to sixteen hours a day and stayed at the school many nights (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2003, 2009; Seo, 2004, 2009).

Since they regarded themselves as the key architects who elaborated the directions and procedures of the school change from the very beginning, they were willing to shoulder the heavy burden of staying on top of everything all the time. They
worked hard to compensate for insufficient resources and under-organized routines and structures. During the interviews, many teachers and parents acknowledged that through the two teachers’ relentless commitment, blood, sweat and tears, SCE could weather the formidable challenges and survive the uncertainty. For example, a parent told me,

“Whenever I passed by the school after work late at night, I could see that the school building’s lights were on and that Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang were busy working. Although I didn’t even know what they were actually doing, I felt deep appreciation to them for the fact that they were still there. It spurred me to make even greater efforts for them and for SCE” (Chae-Rin’s dad).

Similarly, Mr. Han, a teacher, confirmed that since they literally did all the work the other teachers had a lot of time on their hands during the beginning stage. The activist teachers’ hard work provided the other teachers and parents with a unifying vision and sense of relational trust. This also bred feelings of obligation toward the teachers and developed strong loyalties to them and SCE (Klatch, 2004; Lalich, 2004; Rothschild & Leach, 2006). To review, SCE was escorted by cultivating the meaning of change, positive trustful emotions, and collaborative relationships.

Fitting the SCE’s innovation into prevailing systems

SCE’s innovation was not produced in a vacuum. It occurred under the noses of the Korean school system’s hierarchical bureaucracy (Falletti, 2009). It was still subject to normative definitions of conventional schooling and institutional pressures (Huerta, 2002). How could it fit into the existing system?

SCE’s innovation was a self-initiated change (Hargreaves, 2004). It occurred in the absence of external or top-down intervention. Although the school closing crisis opened up new opportunities, there were no guarantees that SCE’s innovation would take
hold (Campbell, 2004). Change agents might have accepted the school closing or they might have disagreed about how to solve the crisis or about whether anything could be done about it.

In choosing the strategic direction to transform SCE into an innovative school, the founding teachers had to come up with a new way of schooling that was neither too similar to nor radically different from what was acceptable to institutional incumbents (Clemens, 1997). Accordingly, while the change agents initially chose a grassroots bottom-up strategy by which they deliberately attempted to disrupt the status quo of conventional bureaucratic schooling and carve a specific niche for a specialized human-size and caring school, they had to drop their confrontational strategies in order to avoid potential conflicts with the sponsoring school district.

“If we had carried out overly oppositional practices and pursued an adversarial stance, we might have faced concentrated repression from the school district and difficulty obtaining legitimacy and resources. These pressures and repressions would have eroded SCE’s capacity to survive, resulting in hastening SCE’s early closure.” (Mr. Kang, teacher)

Thus, instead of challenging the existing school system head-on, the founding teachers worked within the existing system by adding new initiatives and realigning old ideas on top of the existing system (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003; Thelen, 2003; Thelen & Mahoney, 2009). The old guard also preserved desirable elements of current institutional arrangements during the process of changing the school (Hargrave and Van de Ven, 2009: 130). Preserving the attractive elements of existing institutions makes new institutions more recognizable and makes institutional change less abrupt and less painful (Abrahamson, 2004). This way, the activist teachers could also
balance their burning sense of justice and moral purpose for wholesale change with the need to minimize risks to their careers and secure Principal Lee’s and school district officials’ support in enacting their goals. They had to garner management support to ensure SCE’s survival and to achieve their goals. At the same time, this strategy explains the limits of their activism, indicating how they could not afford to seem too radical or extreme (Reay et al., 2006; Scully & Segal, 2002). For example, according to the activist teachers, they deliberately represented their somewhat radical, grassroots-like, change initiative as a “small school initiative”, which can be seen as more socially legitimate and more receptive to both political left and right (Klongsky & Ayers, 2006; McQuillan, 2008). Mr. Kang said, with hindsight, that

“From the very beginning, given the stakes involved in the change initiative and the unfavorable school district bureaucrats, we were extremely careful in devising ways to convey the meaning of SCE’s change to outsiders in order not to provoke the school district. We portrayed our change as an experiment seeking a solution to the endemic problems of large bureaucratic schools within the sphere and the constraint of public schooling. By portraying the SCE as a small and beautiful school at the periphery, we could carve our niche for pursuing our goal that directly and indirectly challenged the existing bases of hierarchical and bureaucratic school authority.”

As they depicted their change as a part of small-school initiatives, it was much easier for them to borrow familiar concepts such as “individual freedom,” “choice,” “self-actualization,” and “participation” from within the existing neo-liberal discourses about educational reform and use them for their own purposes to enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of school bureaucrats. In the prevalent neo-liberal discourses of educational reform in South Korea, conventional bureaucracies are viewed as major impediments to good schooling and the principles of choice, individual freedom, and self-actualization have
unwittingly entered the school system. This makes these bureaucracies more permeable to bottom-up and grass-roots change initiatives that are pursued under the guise of small school initiatives enhancing parental participation and choice. In other words, the rise of neoliberalism in education in South Korea may inadvertently provide a more favorable environment for the radical change agents of SIC equipped with the skills of creative recombination, heightened political awareness, and temporal intelligence to infiltrate and alter the existing educational system without unnecessary pain (Abrahamson, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Falletti, 2009).

In addition, SCE’s innovation could avoid the scrutiny of the bureaucratic system because of its spatial and geographical character at the territorial and functional periphery (Foote & Baker, 2006; Hargreaves, 2003; Hamel, 2000; Raeburn, 2004; Rao et al., 2000) or “free space” (Polletta, 1999). The activist teacher, Mr. Kang, characterized SCE’s as a “change at the margin.”

“Since SCE was a small school located in an isolated rural area, school bureaucrats did not perceive its innovation to be a serious threat at all. As a matter of fact, this kind of ignorance and indifference inadvertently allowed the innovation to occur with less hardship than I had anticipated.” (Mr. Kang, teacher)

In sum, SCE’s change can be conceptualized as an incremental and endogenous change rather than an abrupt one because the founding actors drew on the pre-given arrangements and practices around them and engaged in creative recombination rather than wholesale change or complete replacement (Abrahamson, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004; Schneiberg, 2007; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). In other words, SCE operated in the “grey” areas “between the movement and the establishment”
(McLaughlin et al., 2009), creating a distinct form of organizational structure that enhanced its survival and ability to extend innovation further (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Westphal & Zajac, 1994; Herness, 2005; Palier, 2005; Contu, 2008; Kraatz & Block, 2009; Fotaki, 2009).

However, there were limitations to this form of school innovation. The precarious and ambivalent nature of SCE’s innovation put it at particular risk of being subjected to increasing complexity, confusion, and suspicion in its organizational life over time\(^\text{20}\) (Cuban et al., 2010). This might have planted the seeds of contradictions and dilemmas that could have made SCE susceptible to later internal conflicts or to cooptation by external entities, unless SCE engaged in continuous and careful working out and renegotiation in the evolving contexts (Levy & Scully, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Wallace, 1998). In the next chapter, I will examine how the change agents addressed the challenge of sustaining change over time. Then, beyond its survival, I will show how the change agents amplified change and generated system-level change in the broader organizational field.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the remarkable transformation of SCE - from a failing school facing imminent school closing to a household name as an innovative elementary school...
school in South Korea. This change occurred endogenously in the absence of an external intervention or top down reform mandate by relying on incremental but subversive change strategies including creative recombination of participatory democracy and small school approaches and reorienting them towards the bureaucratic school system to infiltrate it under the neoliberal guise of strengthening parent participation and individual freedom. I also highlighted how the distinctive activists could be characterized as tempered radicals or institutional activists and detailed how their dual commitments stimulated them to challenge the bureaucratic status quo while conforming to the bureaucratic rules and procedures. SCE’s innovation demonstrates that it is possible to break away, in an incremental and endogenous manner, from bureaucratic institutions and reveals a possible process through which apparently small endogenous change can gradually yield transformative and widespread change in broader contexts.

However, while participatory democratic innovation can provide an alternative to hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of schooling, it is well noted that sustaining organizations that adopt participatory and communal forms of organizational change is very difficult and may lead to many struggles that challenge organizations and their ability to sustain themselves (Freeman, 1973; Peters, 2001; Polletta, 2002; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007; Chen, 2009; Henig & Stone, 2009; Olsen, 2009). In the next chapter, I turn to the issue of how an innovative school dedicated to the principles of participatory democracy and community sustained its innovation without the benefit of having standard bureaucratic procedures and routines as it matured.
CHAPTER 5
SUSTAINING CHANGE

Introduction

SICs are neither easy to establish nor to sustain once they are set in motion (Stone, 2001). From the outset, SCE confronted many challenges in sustaining change. Internally, SCE found it difficult to coordinate its efforts and manage its interdependence. Externally, SCE challenged the school district’s structural and cultural regularities. Therefore, since its inception, survival and sustainability had always been the most immediate and crucial issue for SCE. Without concerted sustaining efforts, SCE would have not survived its infancy.

This chapter focuses on how SCE sustained its change over time. First, I discuss the strategy of building relationships and enhancing relational power. Then, I highlight the strategies of coordinating participation. Third, I examine the role of leadership. Fourth, I investigate how SCE navigated the daunting challenge of maintaining contradictory relationships (cooperative and adversarial relationships at the same time) between SCE and the school district. Fifth, I discuss the dilemma of amplifying change into a broader organizational field while maintaining the original mission. I close the chapter by examining the puzzling lag between the successful symbolic/political innovation and technical/instructional development.

Enhancing participation

From the beginning, the old guard emphasized that all members were active participants and avoided patterns of hierarchical dominance (Freeman, 1972-1973; Reger,
Since Principal Lee decided to relinquish his formal authority, SCE’s goal of building a genuinely participatory democratic and collectivist school appeared favorable in the beginning stage. The founding members sought to redistribute authority by using participatory democracy as the model of teacher-parent interaction rather than relying on conventional decision making and governing procedures which they thought would contradict their foundational beliefs in participation and authenticity. The old guard was especially concerned about the side-effect of formalization. They were keenly aware that formalization is often accompanied by goal displacement, diminished organizational willingness to be open to members, co-optation of grassroots processes and the concentration of power in favor of a small group of organization elites through their long experience of movements (Michels, 2001; Piven & Cloward, 1977; Selznick, 1949: 224).

Given the negative perception of formalization, the old guard and the founding members sought to resist formalization through the deliberate use of participation-oriented organizational structures and processes (e.g. relational approaches, ad-hoc problem solving, and collective leadership) while still working toward organizational

---

21 The teaching profession in South Korea has been traditionally regarded as an honorable job due to the influence of Confucianism, which is a foundation for Korean cultural values (Sorensen, 1994; Kang & Hong, 2008). There is a famous Confucian saying “Kings, teachers, and parents are equal,” which means that kings, teachers, and parents should be respected equally. This Confucian respect for teachers is well embodied in an old Korean admonition: “Don’t even step on the shadow of a teacher.” Although the trust of the teaching profession has been radically undermined in recent decades due to the influence of modernization, globalization and consumerism, traditional respect for teachers is still evident in Korean society (Sorensen, 1994; Kang & Hong, 2008). The intensified demand for parent participation at SCE sometimes clashed with the traditional norms of the “asymmetrical” teacher-parent relationship. On top of this, inevitably there are built-in tensions between participatory democracy and professional expertise. Participatory democracy and parent engagement had to find ways of reconciling the lay role of parents with the expertise of professionals. These contradictory expectations and logics generated ongoing tensions between SCE teachers and parents.
persistence and growth. Thus, they purposively avoided formalized routines and rules and instead tried to make sure the enactment of change operated in ways that best met the members’ individual and collective needs (Polletta, 2002). They pursued the idea of a community-like school grounded in “intimate relationships, networks of quasi-kinship, friendship, and faith” (Clemens & Minkoff, 2004: 160). This emphasis on “structurelessness” characterized by looseness, informality, and intimacy resonated well with the sensibilities of the founding members. It was endorsed by the members as an effective alternative to over-structured bureaucracy. This approach provided the early members with a sense of belonging, autonomy, independence and voice (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2009). Accordingly, the founding members valued personal and intimate relationships. They did not view each other in instrumental terms, and made decisions in a face to face manner. The intimate and informal relationships among the members were particularly strong in the early stage in which parents and teachers spent many evenings and weekends working together to develop school sites, curriculum and extracurricular activities together. Through these experiences, as a parent explained, parents and teachers became “not just active partners but good friends with one another” (Chong-Hyun’s mother). They frequently got together for collaborative work and for fun as well. One founding parent recalled,

“The good old days. We worked hard till late night and went out to the bars for drinks. We had many laughs together. It was really fun! I felt as if I went back to my youthful college days. After spending almost ten tedious years as a housewife and stay at home mom, it was a great “social” opportunity for an average mom like me.” (Ji-Young’s mother)
The parents collectively made lifestyle choices “that attend to all children’s good, not just their own; that are made as if their child is everyone’s child and everyone’s child is their own” (Hargreaves, 2000: 230). The climate of the school was made more familial and secure because of the frequency with which parents attended (Huerta: 2002:97).

**Coordinating participation: A tyranny of structurelessness**

However, in the absence of a shared basis of authority, many conflicts and inbuilt tensions inevitably arose. Participatory democracy and parent engagement had to reconcile the lay role of parents with the expertise of professionals (Henig & Stone, 2009). Debate continued among teachers and parents over just what kind of role parents should assume at SCE, which led to ongoing conflicts. Since some parents invested a lot of their efforts in SCE, they expected that they could exert more say in school decision making than they could in conventional schools. Some parents were too aggressive as a result of their experiences in the civil rights movement. At other times, parents were simply inexperienced in engaging in this kind direct participation and decision making. As a parent explained, the founding parents’ expectations for participation were very high.

“As we (parents) put a lot of our efforts in launching SCE from the beginning, it was natural that they expected to exert more say in school decision making than we did in other conventional schools.” (Chong-Hyun’s mother)

Meanwhile, meeting these parents’ sometimes excessive expectations and competing ideas on how things should get done proved taxing to the teachers. A teacher explained that,
“It became increasingly difficult to deal with parents who were so radical and aggressive in the decision making processes that they ignored teachers’ professional authority while working with other parents who were simply inexperienced (and indifferent to) in participating in this kind of democratic decision makings and school activities” (Mr. Han, teacher).

Thus, the founding members experienced growing pains in their attempts to implement a genuinely participatory and collectivist process of school decision making, as they often held different ideas of how things should get done at SCE, which tended to create fragmentation within the organization (Polletta, 2002). This aspiring organizational form did not provide formal channels through which members could arrive at the binding decisions necessary to plan political action in a timely manner. Attempts to decide among incompatible perspectives often led to organizational paralysis and personal hostility. This reflects the well-established finding that one reason community forms of organization have not received as much attention as traditional bureaucratic forms is the former’s inability to resolve problems of power, authority, and governance (Rothschild & Russell, 1986; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979, 1986; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007).

The founding members had to continually faced coordination problems - what Freeman (1972) famously calls “a tyranny of structurelessness” (cited in Polletta, 2002) - which were posed by a commitment to the open, participatory organizational form. In her classic critique of consensus-based and relationship-oriented organizations, Freeman (1972) argues that when devotion to structurelessness reaches the level of dogma, it ceases being a progressive force. She argues that within the power void of structurelessness, informal and
oligarchical elites and cliques may arise that ironically generate pseudo anti-participatory power structures. Similarly, Polletta (2002) explained how the pursuit of participatory democracy and collective activism sometimes generates unanticipated alienation. For example, the decision making process at SCE was supposed to be democratic, but it tended to be increasingly dominated by those who had been there longest. Since SCE’s organizational innovation was brought about by the unsparing efforts of its founding members, their feelings of ownership differed substantially from newer parents. The longstanding founding parents felt that their voices should carry more weight, whereas newcomers wondered whether SCE was truly democratic. In so doing, the longstanding parents intentionally or inadvertently excluded and sought to tame the newcomers.

As the following interview segment with a newcomer parent states:

“Before I came to SCE, I expected SCE to be a truly democratic community, but that’s not the case at all! There is a strong invisible hierarchy among the parents. Whenever I tried to initiate a new program or event, the longstanding parents intruded and ridiculed my efforts by saying “After we have worked for years to prepare a banquet at SCE, you have appeared at the table ready for a free meal!” I responded, “No, we didn’t. We are bringing just as much to the table as you have!” But they just turned up their noses. They like they were the real owners of SCE. It’s so frustrating. I just dropped what I had planned to do and am trying to do what I am supposed do as a newcomer.” (Jun-Ho’s mother, 2nd year parent at SCE)

The longstanding parents tended to view the newcomer parents as “free-riders” and attributed the dilution of SCE’s original goals to the influx of underprepared new-members.
In addition, there were also recurring tensions between the native resident parent group and the newly moved parent group from the very beginning. The local resident parents were mostly small restaurant owners who were not college-educated. Sometimes they said that they felt intimidated by parents from neighboring cities who were college educated and seemed to be increasingly dominant at SCE. They sometimes felt that their beloved community and school were being occupied and exploited by intruders who left town once their children graduated. A native resident parent noted that,

“Sometimes I felt intimidated by the newly moved parents from cities who were mostly college-educated and middle class. They seemed to be increasingly dominant at SCE with their eloquence and knowledge. We sometimes felt that we had our school taken away by visitors who would leave this community immediately after their children graduated from SCE once and for all” (Hyung-Seo’s father, a native castle resident parent).

These practices of informal and intimate structure operating on the basis of friendship contradicted the espoused beliefs. This kind of cognitive dissonance and the experience of alienation at SCE which some members had believed to be truly democratic and inclusive created many difficulties.

Fire fighting: Ad-hoc problem solving strategy

Conflicts are inevitable parts of the change process (Fullan, 1998). What matters is how the inevitable conflicts resulting from ambiguity are managed. In order to address the internal conflicts and contradictions, the old guard engaged in ad-hoc fire fighting. Initially, the founding teachers deployed an ad hoc approach to foster organic and spontaneous governance instead of relying on formalized or bureaucratized routines or procedures. Ad hoc strategy was a “loose, flexible, self-renewing organic form tied together mostly through lateral means” (Bolman & Deal, 2006: 79; See also Mintzberg,
1985). Similarly, Winter (2003) defined ad-hoc problem solving as “non-routine and non-repetitive problem solving activities, typically appearing as a response to relatively unpredictable events (p. 993).”

However, adhering to ad-hoc and organic problem solving proved difficult because conflicts and troubles occurred in many areas. The old guard clung to a romanticized view of participatory democracy and community in which everyone hungers for collaboration and participation (Bolman & Deal, 2003). They could be “overly optimistic about integrating individual and organization needs while neglecting structure and the stubborn realities of conflict” (Bolman & Deal, 2003: 417). As the old guard upheld an idealistic notion of a community free of conflict for the goal of change and viewed SCE as a very fragile organization, they tended to act defensively. They regarded conflicts as dangerous and tried to take care of them in an urgent and immediate manner (Fullan, 2001; Repenning, 2001)\(^\text{22}\). Mr. Woo asked,

> “Do you know why SCE survived despite so many problems and contradictions? That’s because Mr. Rhyu and I had been “putting out fires” night and day whenever issues broke out. We met the parties concerned in person and soothed angry persons. I don’t know how much “Soju” and beer I had to drink to accomplish that. Mr. Rhyu and I were a good team.”

Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Woo mostly relied on the relational approach in resolving issues and problems. Instead of depending on cold routines or inflexible rules, they aspired to resolve problems in as humane a manner as they could. If problems were too

\(^{22}\) Similarly, institutional scholars, Hirsch and Bermess (2009), conceptualize fire-fighting as institutional ‘dirty’ work that is aimed at preserving institutions through backstage work of skilled actors (pp. 22-23).
complicated to address, then they delayed solving them or covered them up in the hopes of avoiding confrontation and preserving harmony.

The old guard did not rush to solve every problem. Rather, they took a long-term gradual approach, with sequential coupling and decoupling strategies occurring over time as part of different change strategies (structural, cultural, and political) (Denis et al, 2001; Hallett, 2010; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976). While Mr. Rhyu was often regarded as an ideologically radical and idealistic activist by others, this view may obscure his nuanced, creative, and pragmatic ability to understand and exploit contradictions in accomplishing the work of school change. Mr. Rhyu elaborated his pragmatic strategies this way:

“...I don’t agree with members who advocate a utopian version of participatory democracy and its accompanying strategies of relationship building. It is an unrealistic myth and impossible to implement in the public school context...”

They achieved this reconciliation of idealism and pragmatism by employing a tempered view of participatory democracy suggested by Polletta (2002):

“...No one believes any longer that decisions can be made by strict consensus. Activists are more comfortable with rules, less hostile to power, and more attuned to inequalities concealed in informal relations” (p. 202).

To effectively enact SCE’s change involving divergent interests and values, Mr. Rhyu had to be comfortable with paradoxes in ideals and practice, be able to give meaning to these apparent contradictions to the members, and be able to coordinate the members (Fullan, 2001; Huy, 2001). These considerations and his pragmatic approach to participatory-democratic school change were embodied in his distinct symbolic change strategy that will be discussed later in this chapter. Though these efforts, Mr. Rhyu gave
people involved the impression that “the needs being addressed are significant and that they are making at least some progress toward meeting them” (Fullan, 2001: 69).

However, Mr. Rhyu’s approach inadvertently caused several problems. To begin with, it allowed SCE to enjoy a smooth start, but unacknowledged conflicts and tensions turned into more aggressive outbursts later (Fullan, 1998). Moreover, since this approach addressed issues reactively on a case by case basis without thoroughly considering their intricate nature, the demands for firefighting escalated. Indeed, firefighting became a self-reinforcing and counterproductive phenomenon (Repenning, 2001).

“When the problems came up, Mr. Rhyu and his prodigy, Mr. Woo, sought to resolve them with band-aid solutions without really dealing with the issues. This strategy appeared to work for a while, but not for long, as parents and teachers raised issues repeatedly. By the way, Mr. Woo learned many tricks, like backstage politics, from Mr. Rhyu. I think that they just “sutured” wounds without actually remedying them. Indeed, it was a polite way of just masking problems.” (Mr. Han, teacher)

The fire fighting strategy relying on the relational approach for conflict resolution had another limitation. Much like the old adage, “if the only tool you own is a hammer, all your problems look like nails,” all problems were viewed as interpersonal ones. Problems were attributed to personal defects or relationship issues, thus overlooking problems underlying organizational realignments or structural adjustments (Hoffman, 2001; Polletta, 2002; Chen, 2009).

“The people at SCE are always quick to attribute any problems to other peoples’ faults. They engaged in endless meetings to discuss the problems they were facing and how to solve them as a community at the beginning but always ended up only hurting each other by focusing on who was responsible for the problems, rather than coming up with a more constructive or tangible solution. They always complain “the principal is a
problem, the teachers are problem, or the parents are the problem without reflecting on one’s own conduct.” (Mr. Yoon, teacher)

It was a particularly pathological situation “where attempts to resolve the tensions and contradictions actually aggravated them rather than easing them” (Hernes, 2005:11). Although the relentless firefighting seemed to control the flames, under the surface, the embers continued to burn. “The danger is not the contradiction, but pretending that it doesn’t exist” (Leach, 2009: 1049). Without specified problem solving strategies, SCE had to continuously consume its energy covering up problems and repressing members rather than focusing on fulfilling organizational goals.

The real strengths of ad-hoc approaches, a flowering of creativity and autonomy, became liabilities when the school needed timely and coordinated change to move forward (Bolman & Deal, 2003). While the ad hoc problem solving approach might work in volatile circumstances for a limited time (Winter, 2003), this mode of acting does not provide a sustainable advantage (Repenning, 2001; Currie et al., 2009).

**Inclusive community or exclusive community**

To the extent that all inclusion is simultaneously exclusion, the deepening of SCE’s community had the potential to fuel conflicts at the boundaries of belonging (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1998; Clemens, 2005). Over time, SCE has experienced rapid growth in terms of reputation and student enrollment. However, not everyone appreciated this because it could erode the original configuration of SCE as a small self-selected community. The rapid increase in enrollment also led to less care for individual students and problems of integrating new students and increased number of parents not prepared for SCE (O’Mahony & Chen, 2009) brought unrealistic illusions that SCE would be a
safe haven after experiencing many failures in large schools, and pressures on altering
structures and curriculum designed for a small school setting. Mr. Han said that,

“Due to the increased enrollment, we had to reduce interaction with
parents and teachers. Student behaviors got worse than before. There were
more discipline issues. Moreover, some of the innovative intensive
programs which were the symbols of SCE, such as the Spring/Autumn
extracurricular camps and the art festivals, had to be cancelled or at least
curtailed.”

However, as a public school in which neighborhood school policy was applied,
there was no overt way of controlling the influx of students from outside. Real estate
values in the area skyrocketed. Considering the inconvenience and the poor quality of
housing in the area, the prices were unreasonably expensive. The housing price and
inconvenience were unlikely gatekeepers that SCE could rely on to control student
enrollment. However, occasionally, some parents made their way to SCE by using false
addresses or by changing their address without actually residing in the area. SCE parents
who paid extremely high costs in terms of finance and inconvenience were extremely
sensitive about the issue of entering SCE illegitimately and were hostile to the illegal
intruders.

For example, in the spring of 2008, a family moved to the area to send their only
daughter, Mi-Ra (3rd grade), to enroll in SCE. Several months later, parents began to be
suspicious about the newcomers because the house lights were rarely turned on and the
parking garage was always empty even at night. After observing this for several weeks in
a row, a group of parents raised this issue at a PTA meeting. Later, they asked the family
to tell the truth regarding their residence. Mi-Ra’s father, who had been actively involved
in school activities and developed relationships with other fathers and Mr. Rhyu, claimed
that they had been residing there ever since they moved in. There were heated debates among the parents about the situation. Some of the parents felt bewildered by the contradiction between the emphasis given by SCE on “inclusive community” and the actual exclusive behavior and “panoptic surveillance” (Foucault, 1975; See also, Chen, 2009) that betrayed their claim. During an interview, one parent noted,

“You don’t know how callous and cold-hearted the parents of this school are. Look what happened with poor Mi-Ra’s family. I think that they were scapegoats of our masked violence and selfishness. That’s the naked nature of this school. The other day, I attended a PTA meeting and raised this issue of our hypocrisy with Mi-Ra’s family only to be fiercely attacked by angry parents. They told me to “Shut up, you free-rider! What have you done yourself for SCE except sending your son here? How dare you say such an absurd thing!” (Jong-Seo’s dad)

At the beginning, SCE faculty members were reluctant to engage in this controversial issue since they believed that it should be handled by the parent body. When the issue continuously surfaced and parents became increasingly emotional, the old guard was drawn into the dispute. A couple of years later, the new leader, Principal Choi, finally stepped forward to settle the issue. When the principal was repeatedly asked to expel the family from SCE by angry mothers, he refused their request,

“As an educator myself, I will not remove any students in the middle of the semester even when the family has made a mistake. If Mi-Ra has to leave, it will be next spring when the new semester begins.”

Principal Choi approached Mi-Ra’s father and had an honest talk with him. Since he trusted the family, he asked his family to stay at SCE after clearing out the needless suspicions. But the family admitted that their actions may have caused unnecessary misunderstandings and decided to leave SCE.
Ironically, SCE made inclusivity a defining feature of its innovation since its inception. Indeed, while its inclusiveness and communal life attracted a variety of people searching for a “safe haven” school, this also generated the possibility of having its actual and inevitable exclusions pointed out as evidence of hypocrisy (Armstrong, 2002). SCE was initially imagined as a utopian community contrasting with the bureaucratic system in the neighborhood (Polletta, 2002). By interpreting SCE’s slogan of “a small and beautiful community cultivating authentic learning and genuine life” more broadly, those who leveled accusations of exclusion and hypocrisy had a legitimate grievance (Armstrong, 2002; See also Brunsson, 2002).

Due to the continued growth and success of SCE’s innovation, combined with changes in the political environment, the recurring issue of inclusion/exclusion and the mismatch between behavior and stated beliefs “reached a critical point” (Chong-Hyun’s mother) as a longstanding parent mother noted. Some members began to question whether the relational approach and the vision of community were only pipe dreams and searched for a more pragmatic alternative. With few systems or procedures to facilitate the governing of the school, coupled with on-going school politics, the intensified need to coordinate interdependent member activities and integrate member contributions in the school context ironically generated strong leadership and charismatic leaders (Seo, 2004). Without a decisive leader, the fragile SCE could have got bogged down by process, politics, and cynicism about distressing uncertainty and ambiguity (Huerta, 2002; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007; Harris et al., 2007). Thus, the reality was that certain
individuals had to play leadership roles whether they wanted to or not (Polletta, 2005; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). In the following section, I highlight the leadership of the old guard and its creative strategies of sustaining change in the face of challenges over time.

**The leadership of the old guard**

The founding activist teachers assumed the key roles of coordinating the participatory governance structure. In general, the key tasks of leaders include: the definition of organizational mission and role; the organizational embodiment of moral purpose; the defense of organizational integrity; and the ordering of internal conflict (Kraatz, 2009). However, not wanting to reproduce conventional hierarchical structures at SCE, teacher activists said that they struggled to establish a balance between both being decisive leaders and skillful coordinators. To do this, they encouraged parent participation while exercising the subtle leadership necessary to sustain participatory democracy that would not violate their cherished belief in non-hierarchical governance.

The two activist teachers were savvy leaders who understood the organizational and political complexities of the change processes and acted accordingly (Fullan, 1998, 2001; Kraatz, 2009). They were realists who understood the informal power structure, built-in limitations and contradictions of their organization. They were also effective organizational politicians who were adept at building coalitions, using rhetoric and symbols (Bolman & Deal, 2006). They needed to be able to talk about their organization “as if it were an integrated whole even when it was not (and perhaps especially when it is not)” (Kraatz, 2009: 79). At the same time, it was also considerably important for them to
win trust and collaboration in the context of a young innovative organization where risks were high and its legitimacy might be taken-for-granted and risks were high (Fullan, 2001; Huy & Zott, in press; Kraatz, 2009).

The two activist teachers often faced competing or conjoint imperatives: the organizational imperative for implementation and organizational maintenance; and the moral imperative for self-consistency and integrity (Fullan, 1998, 2001, 2003; Kraatz, 2009). Under this situation, when a leader leads a young and innovative organization characterized by lack of precise needs and ambiguous power structure, the integrity of leadership is vulnerable to criticism (Selznick, 1957; Kraatz, 2009). Sometimes, leaders may paradoxically lose support and trust from their constituents “when their strategic efforts to cater to their constituencies send negative signals about their own character, commitment, and trustworthiness” (Kraatz, 2009: 78).

The two activist teachers worked hard and took care of everything to sustain SCE’s innovation. As a parent said, “they worked eight days a week!” They tried to be all things to all people. They were willing to shoulder the heavy burden of staying on top of everything all the time to incubate their precious baby from any internal or external threats. They worked heroically to compensate for insufficient resources and under-organized routines and structures. With regard to this, during the interview, Mr. Rhyu noted:

“Mr. Kang and I deliberately tried to accomplish all work related to the school ourselves so that the other teachers could devote most of their time and energy to their classrooms. We knew that they were already experiencing various setbacks. They were struggling with overwhelming workloads and relationship fatigue with parents. As senior colleagues and also as teacher leaders, we wanted to give them much needed rest.”
Other teachers and parents acknowledged that the activist teachers had acquired their influences not only by rhetoric or strategies, but also by their extremely hard work, moral purpose, and authenticity. Their lives had been ones of incessant effort (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2009; Seo, 2004). Other teachers confirmed that the two teachers had been tenacious, persistent, and indefatigable activists, which would be extremely difficult for anyone to succeed in imitating (Kang & Cho, 2010; Michels, 2001[1912]; Seo, 2004).

However, as Fullan (2001) suggests, the good intentions of the old guard could have easily backfired. Although the activist teachers did not intend to become domineering figures, as they became more committed and invested in change, they became less effective in getting others to implement (Espeland & Sauder, 2008; Fullan, 2001). When the activist teachers were doing all the work to exploit the openings for change while protecting the fragile organization in a timely manner, they inadvertently excluded others and ended up dominating the decision-making process (Fullan, 2001; Michels, 2001[1912]; Rothschild & Leach, 2006). It was difficult for the old guard to command others and build warm trusting relationships with people at the same time (Huy, 2001). They also demonstrated the innovator’s tendency of being impatient and unyielding and unable to alter their realities of change and while being open to the others’ realities (Fullan, 2001). Mr. Han, a teacher, called the activist teachers “front-wheel teachers” and the other teachers, including himself, “rear-wheel teachers.”

“While the front wheel teachers mostly led, the other rear wheels teachers had to follow or to be dragged along by the front-wheels. The rear wheel teachers felt that they were constantly being pressured into decision making with which they did not always agree or that they were being held hostage to the front wheel teachers’ preference. When the rear wheel
teachers voiced concerns, they tended to regard this as criticism or an attempt to diminish their importance.”

For this reason, these ‘rear-wheel’ teachers wondered whether SCE was truly democratic.

“Has SCE ever been a true democracy? I don’t think so. SCE has never been a true democracy, not even once! (Mr. Woo, teacher)”

“There is a lot of lip service and rhetoric that SCE is a democratic and humane school, but there are very few genuine efforts to really involve us.” (Mr. Han, teacher)

The rear wheel teachers perceived that even when they were accepted within the SCE decision making process, they were required to subordinate their agenda to those of the activist teachers. This often meant lowering the importance of instructional development in favor of more visible events or governance issues.

The rear-wheel teachers found that participating in democratic decision making processes that were dominated by front-wheel teachers generated “a feeling of schizophrenia” (Mr. Yoon, teacher; see also, Polletta, 2002: 148). They experienced emotional labor as draining and exhausting – leading to feelings of alienation and loss of the self (Hargreaves & Bascia, 2000: 12). They felt that the activists’ commitment to democracy was inauthentic and hypocritical (Armstrong, 2002; Brunsson, 2002; Christensen, 2003; Hernes, 2003). Some parents also complained about the old guard’s leadership style by saying that,

“He is a fake. He is condescending. He always double-talks.” (Anonymous Father)

“I don’t believe him because he is sly like a viper. He always pretends to try to please everybody, but I don’t know what he is really up to beneath his smile.” (Anonymous Father)
One teacher even noted that the old guard’s hard work and devotion was power-driven:

“Do you want me to tell you one secret of gaining power at SCE? It’s work! The more Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu worked, the more powerful they became. After many years of working at SCE, I eventually realized this. When there was no more work to do, Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang would create new work and a new agenda. Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang always worked late at night and created new issues one after another! This way, they maintained their power. However, with the two doing literally all the work, we had a lot of time on our hands without much to do.” (Mr. Han, teacher)

The rear wheels found that attempting to find a place for themselves within SCE was difficult. As a result, Mr. Yoon, one of the founding teachers, decided to leave SCE altogether in 2004. Unclear decision making policies and the lack of bureaucratic safety nets unwittingly made it easier for the activist teachers to exercise control (Leach, 2005; Rothschild & Leach, 2006; Chen, 2009). This echoes Hargreaves and Fink’s (2006) claim that the link between anarchy (lack of formal authority and procedures) and autocracy is a thin one. As this development demonstrated, participatory democratic organizations may succumb quickly to authoritarian ones, increasing the opportunities for arbitrary power (Fullan, 2001; Woods & Gronn, 2009). The rear-wheel teachers said that they experienced more stress from Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang and internalized pressure than they would have in a conventional bureaucratic school where only principals supervised their practices (Barker, 1993, 1999; Fullan, 2001). They cynically called SCE “the Republic of teachers (the two activist teachers’ school)”! Contrary to the conventional belief, this finding suggests that the replacement of positional leaders with teacher leaders does not guarantee the advent of a more democratic school (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Harris et al., 2007).
Meanwhile, the old guard suffered another setback: burnout. Extremely hard workers though they might be, the old guard could not do everything by themselves and ended up leaving many things incomplete. They became moral martyrs who tried to fix everything themselves. They worked to the point of exhaustion (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009: 74). Mr. Rhyu confirmed this by saying that while he had to convince parents and teachers of the values of the change endeavor, he also felt as if he rode an emotional rollercoaster,

“I think SCE is a blessing and a curse at the same time for me. I think that I constantly oscillate between these two emotional extremes: Sometimes, I feel heavenly joy; other times, I feel as if I underwent infernal agony.”

(Mr. Rhyu, teacher)

Mr. Yoon, another SCE teacher, metaphorically described the leadership of the old guard in an article posted on the school website:

“A defeated soccer team in which star-players showed off all their “super human” skills and monopolized the ball all during the game, thus making all the other players idle spectators: much adoration and enthusiasm and no winning.” (Mr. Yoon, teacher)

To review, pursuing integrity and effectiveness of leadership at the same time can be extremely difficult when it concerns ambitious change in the context of uncertainty and complexity (Fullan, 1998; Kraatz, 2009). As Fullan (2003) suggests, moral purpose may be by no means straightforward; the integrity of leadership is characteristically vulnerable. The old guard’s unwittingly domineering leadership continued to surface in ways that delegitimized their integrity and moral purpose and thus the meaning and the long-term sustainability of SCE. They could not achieve moral purpose and integrity of
leadership without developing mutual empathy and relationships across diverse groups of parents and teachers, and this was no easy task (Fullan, 1998: 2).

Fragility of collective-leadership

Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang had complementary leadership skills. While Mr. Kang was a confrontational and rational leader, Mr. Rhyu was more subtle and overtly emotional. Their distinct approach to co-leadership was extremely helpful to initiate the grass-roots style SIC and stabilize the fragile young organization in the context of uncertainty and complexity. However, these benefits came with risks. The differences between the two teachers inevitably caused many disagreements. They tried to contain their differences because they were well aware that the internal power struggles between them would have been devastating and threatened the survival of SCE. However, as SCE became settled beyond the initiation of the change, Mr. Kang’s space for influence narrowed. While Mr. Kang’s forceful and confrontational approach was effective in resisting bureaucratic authority and providing vision during the early stage, his aggressive style made him constantly struggle with parents, teachers, and principals.

Moreover, while he was a superb activist, he was incompetent in his own classroom. Mr. Han and Mr. Rhyu confirmed that his weak teaching skills could have been devastating in a small innovative school which operated like a fishbowl in which every activity inside the classroom was transparent to onlookers. When his assigned term at SCE drew to close in 2006, Mr. Kang decided to move to a neighboring school to spread innovation (Kang & Cho, 2010; Rhyu, 2009). Instead of settling down or being complacent with the partial success achieved at SCE, he pursued broader goals and
commitment to the common good (Tarrow, 1998; Leach, 2006) by initiating a teacher network, “School Design 21”, for pursuing further SIC. In contrast, Mr. Rhyu was an excellent classroom teacher and an outstanding organizer with effective people skills (Fliegstein, 2001; Hallett, 2007; Spillane et al., 2003). Mr. Han said that parents always wanted Mr. Rhyu to be their children’s homeroom teacher. Mr. Rhyu could induce compliance and consensus even when Mr. Kang had failed. While Mr. Kang left SCE in 2006, Mr. Rhyu extended his term for another four years at SCE since he acquired trust and relational power with the principal, teachers, and parents. They preferred Mr. Rhyu over Mr. Kang. Though the two activist teachers promoted change together, constituents evaluated the viability of their leadership separately (Denis et al., 2001). Collective leadership may be susceptible to organizational rivalry (Denis et al., 1996, 2001). Selznick (1957) argues in his classic work on leadership that organizational rivalry is perhaps the most important problem in organizational life (see also Kraatz, 2009). Despite the apparent importance of collectiveness and collaboration, collective leadership is fragile (Denis et al., 2001).

Collective leadership can be problematic due to personal factors such as distinct dispositions or to diverging conceptions of the relative importance of change strategies (Denis et al., 2001; Fullan, 2001). Collective leadership can lead to possible leadership turnover in a subsequent stage. Conversely, collective leadership can also become vulnerable to leadership succession imposed from outside or instigated by internal actors (Denis et al., 2001). This clearly occurred at SCE when founding Principal Lee announced his sudden departure in the winter of 2007.
Leadership succession turmoil\(^{23}\)

The issue of leadership succession was never openly discussed at SCE. It had been an elephant in the room in the organization with unclear goals and fluid formal authority (Denis et al., 1996; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The founding teachers said that they avoided discussing leadership succession because they feared that their principal would interpret it as a threat since Principal Lee repeatedly said that he wanted to stay at SCE until retirement. The founding teachers and parents stayed with Principal Lee because they felt “we do not see our way to find an adequate substitute for Principal Lee” (Mr. Rhyu, teacher). They were concerned that like the proverbial expression “Better the known devil than the unknown Beelzebub” (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), either imposed leadership succession by the school district or voluntary internal succession might end up only inviting an autocratic and iron-fisted principal whose leadership would wipe out all school innovation efforts (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005). Therefore, Principal Lee’s real source of power that allowed him to significantly prolong his term at SCE over eight years despite his apparently weak and mediocre leadership skills lay in his indispensability (Michels, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005).

Besides, the two activist teachers did not want break the fragile power equilibrium of collective leadership among the trio (i.e. the principal Lee, Mr. Rhyu, and Mr. Kang) (Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005). Mr. Rhyu said,\(^{23}\)

---

\(^{23}\) During my fieldwork, I had a serendipitous opportunity to observe the leadership succession at SCE. The leadership succession provides a special opportunity to observe the leaders’ interactions and its implications for power and order (See also, Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2007).
“Considering our divergent interests, we both knew that if we had competed with each other for leadership it might mean that either of us had to leave SCE.”

Tensions about veiled hegemony, rivalry between the two teacher activists, and Principal Lee’s insecurity culminated in turmoil concerning leadership succession in the winter of 2007.

In the fall of 2007, the longstanding principal Lee suddenly announced that he would resign from SCE and pursue a new position in another city where he was originally from. It was devastating news to everybody because Principal Lee had openly reaffirmed his intention to stay at SCE only one month before. By coincidence, at that time, the Ministry of Education in South Korea announced a new pilot policy that allowed a teacher with over ten years of teaching experience and excellent leadership skills to become a principal without acquiring a principal certificate\(^{24}\).

Mr. Kang was especially interested in this new principal policy because he believed that “this policy had strong potential to break the traditional route to for becoming a principal for the first time in South Korea and thus dismantle the deep-rooted principal-centered power structure of public schools and bureaucratic schooling.”

In order to exploit this policy opening together with activist teachers, Mr. Kang had initiated a new teacher network, “School Design 21,” one year before in 2006 and had succeeded in helping several activist teachers become principals. Thus, when a new

\(^{24}\) The open recruitment system for principals has been implemented on a trial basis since 2007 to employ principals who are younger and have the leadership skills necessary to meet the needs of individual schools and communities (Park, 2010). Under this policy, principals would be selected by the school council members of each pilot school and then formally appointed by the superintendent of the region.
opening suddenly occurred at SCE, it was natural for Mr. Kang to seek the opportunity. He argued that his proposed occupancy of the principal position was “not just a matter of personal promotion but a matter of structural and political catalytic advancement that could cumulatively give rise to a threshold effect.”

However, Principal Lee opposed Mr. Kang’s move. He said that he would only endorse a candidate with a principal credential. Otherwise, he said that he would veto the application of the new principal policy altogether. He provided two reasons underlying his opposition to Mr. Kang’s application for the principalship. For one thing, he said,

“If I allow either Mr. Kang or Mr. Rhyu to become the principal of SCE, I will be further ostracized by the principal association. I saw one of my friends who is a principal suffer greatly after allowing this to happen at his school.”

In addition, he expressed his concern that,

“Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu (46 and 49 years old each at that time) were still too young to be principal of SCE. In my opinion, they are still too inexperienced to be principal. Even worse, their promotion might raise unnecessary suspicions about their real intentions and could backfire.”

(Principal Lee)

Despite the principal’s opposition, however, Mr. Kang nevertheless pushed ahead with his plan. But there was “friendly fire.” A group of people was distressed about Mr. Kang’s decision to apply for the principal position at SCE without gaining their support or going through the proper procedures. This group preferred Mr. Rhyu over Mr. Kang for the new principal. As a result, Mr. Rhyu was also drawn into the vortex of leadership succession. Even though the two teachers were determined not to compete against each other for power or privilege at SCE and were vigilant about the potentially devastating
effects of internal division between them, they were not immune to the temptation to gain power and control (Kets de Vries, 1991; Selznick, 1957).

It was an irony that the “hands-off” or “robot” principal’s departure had such an impact on the SCE community. After going through this painful event, Mr. Han, a teacher, told me that he realized the reality surrounding SCE’s leadership,

“In hindsight, I realized that Principal Lee might have been hiding Excalibur and drew it at the critical moment of leadership succession because he had all of us fooled and got what he wanted at last. Most of all, he could stay at SCE as principal for eight years, which should have been quite unlikely considering his rather mediocre leadership skills (Mr. Han, teacher)

As the succession process reached an impasse, the activist teachers and other teachers picked an unexpected third-person who had previously been assistant principal at SCE. This analysis suggests that the succession crisis was not just about succession (Hargreaves et al., 2010). Leadership had been a recurring issue and the turmoil surrounding succession was indeed a symptom of a larger and more systemic issue: the ambiguous structures of authority, goals, and less clarified means to achieve the goals (Denis et al., 1996; Hargreaves et al., 2010; Huerta, 2002). The succession crisis revealed the fragility of collective leadership and internal contradictions surrounding participatory governance without clear routines and procedures.

However, the succession crisis was not fatal. While it caused painful cognitive and emotional dissonance, it also opened up opportunities for mindful reflection and candid dialogue that led to a search for solutions to the problem that were a catalyst for new change (Barker, 2006; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006, 2009; Hargreaves & Fink,
2006; Seo & Creed, 2002). More specifically, this paved the way for the rise of the “new guard” who had been silenced under the leadership of the old guard.

**Relay succession planning**

In the aftermath of the succession crisis, the old guard was gradually losing ground since their representation for unadulterated altruism had been shaken. However, Mr. Rhyu persisted in the face of this setback. His resilience and strong sense of purpose helped him get beyond the setbacks by redefining them as challenges to be overcome (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In retrospect, Mr. Woo noted that “Mr. Rhyu was once SCE’s most valuable asset, but now he became SCE’s liability.” SCE’s faculty members became increasingly aware that the old guard’s reluctance to make alterations to their original change ideas was one of the biggest obstacles for SCE’s further development (Collins, 2003; Miller, 1991). Mr. Rhyu became more sensitive to the possibility that the original vision of change was not entirely correct and that he needed to be more open to the ideas of the other teachers that were necessary for implementing change effectively (Fullan, 2001). For example, although Mr. Rhyu had been somewhat dismissive of the insistence of some teachers (Mr. Yoon and Mr. Han in particular) on prioritizing the development of a new curriculum and new instructional guidelines, after the succession crisis, he became more appreciative of their ideas.

In early 2009, after experiencing the problem of lack of succession planning, Mr. Rhyu began discussing succession planning openly with other teachers. He suggested two options for the succession planning. The first was for him to leave SCE in March in 2009 by handing over his position lead teacher to Mr. Yoon, who was one of SCE’s founding
staff members but had to leave SCE due to conflicting interests with the old guard. The second option was to implement a “relay succession”, where the incumbent leader worked with the successor to pass the baton to him. Mr. Rhyu and other teachers agreed to turn to its founding teacher, Mr. Yoon, who had much experience and knowledge in curriculum development to keep SCE on track and pursue further improvement (Huerta, 2002).

Thus, the incumbent teacher leader, Mr. Rhyu, and his successor, Mr. Yoon, planned to work together for one year from 2009 to 2010 until Mr. Rhyu was unexpectedly recruited to serve as a senior advisor to the newly elected superintendent of the region in May 2009. Mr. Rhyu’s decision to engage his colleagues in these candid debates during the crisis helped them overcome the negative outcomes that resulted from the leadership succession and helped him maintain credibility (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Huy, 2001), as well as plant seeds for further change. In the ensuing process, SCE’s change emphasis shifted gradually from the old guard’s change strategy of symbolic governance to the new guard’s way of more substantive instructional development. However, to constitute a credible alternative, these contending actors, the new guard, had to accumulate power, experience, and other capacities (Farjoun, 2001).

The old guard’s departure

In 2009, Mr. Rhyu was suddenly hired as a key senior advisor to the newly elected progressive superintendent. This was consistent with Hargreaves’ (2005) finding that “successful leaders are lifted suddenly and prematurely out of the saddle of the
school they are improving in order to mount a rescue act in a school system facing crisis or challenge elsewhere (p. 70).”

The newly elected superintendent, Sang-Gon Kim, was the first elected non-traditional superintendent in charge of education of a region in South Korea. He had been a university professor in management and had been involved in the civil rights movement and the human rights movement for more than twenty years. He also was the founding president of the first Korean Union for university professors. During his election campaign, he told the voters that he would pursue policies emphasizing freedom, creativity, and autonomy in opposition to test-driven standardization and market-oriented neoliberal educational reform under the slogan of “the Anti-MB education.” After winning a sweeping victory, he began to implement these confrontational policies. When it came to school policies, he was deeply inspired by SCE’s innovation and its success and decided to adopt SCE’s model and spread it to the regional schools.

Certainly, the progressive superintendent’s polices continued to face resistance from the government. He and the MB government have engaged in continuous conflicts. In accordance with Rojas (2007), Gyeonggi province and the progressive superintendent could be viewed as a “counter-centers” or “activist governments” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2007).

---

25 “MB” is the acronym of the incumbent president Lee Myeong-Bak who was a former CEO of Hyundai Construction. He was a legendary self-made and steadfast businessman (his nickname was “bulldozer”) who made it to the apex of success from an extremely poor background. Amidst the economic crisis in South Korea and the world in 2008, he was elected president by promising that he would rescue this country in crisis. As his career and nickname hinted, he is a market fundamentalist who believes in competition, choice, and testing. With regard to education, once he assumed office, he relentlessly enforced many controversial neoliberal educational polices, such as parent evaluations of teachers, standardized testing for all students and making the results open to the public, and privately-funded high schools, which had been held back by the resistance of progressive educators and parents.
2009), within the bureaucratic educational system. Under challenging circumstances and in response to new political openings, Mr. Rhyu said that he rescued the new progressive superintendent who lacked insider knowledge and embedded experience about public schooling as a leader. Mr. Rhyu was able to seize this opportunity thanks to his preparedness and temporal intelligence. Mr. Rhyu represented his departure as “altruistic” by rhetorically claiming that he “would be willing to die like a brave soldier in a new battleground.” In addition, with the support of Mr. Rhyu, Mr. Kang persistently aimed to spread SCE’s innovation to other schools and settings (such as urban mainstream schools and medium to large size schools) and was invited to become principal in an experimental school at a large school designated by the new superintendent of Gyeonggi province. They claimed that by occupying these positions, they could infiltrate the bureaucratic system by exercising discretion and exploiting the room to maneuver. In other words, they claimed that, they would seek to promote “bottom-up reforms, albeit paradoxically, from the top” (Rojas, 2007; Falletti, 2009).

However, the members of SCE had bittersweet feelings about the departures of their leaders and their assumption of new positions of power. On the one hand, many members believed that the old guard’s promotion was indeed an appropriate response to a successful innovation. They anticipated that the old guard’s elevated positions within the system would make it easier to make the bureaucratic system more permeable and easier to adapt to SCE’s innovation. They regarded their advancement as a part of an ongoing activism that reflected activists’ dispositions that seldom settle on any one movement or
organization and instead frequently move from one venue to another to bring about broader influence (Tarrow, 1998; Leach, 2006; Meyer & Kretschmer, 2007).

On the other hand, other members became disillusioned with the old guard. They viewed their positions of power within the mainstream bureaucratic system as self-serving choices dressed in activism. They viewed the old guard as leaders who were more interested in their careers and glories in their achievement and were always seeking to get ahead. George (2007) describes the characteristics of the shooting star leaders as,

“Shooting stars move up so rapidly in their careers that they never have time to learn from their mistakes. A year or two into any job, they are ready to move on, before they have had to confront the results of their decisions. When they see problems of their making coming back to haunt them, their anxiety rises and so does the urgency to move to a new position. If their employer doesn’t promote them, they are off to another organization. One day they find themselves at the top, overwhelmed by an intractable set of problems. At this point, they are prone to impulsive or even irrational decisions, and have no grounding in their lives that enables them to cope in a rational manner. Eventually, shooting stars flame out (p. 8).”

Even one of the closest teachers of Mr. Rhyu, Mr. Woo, was frustrated by Mr. Rhyu’s sudden departure to the regional office to assume a prestigious position. Mr. Woo said with disappointment that,

“I thought at least Mr. Rhyu would be different from many other senior activists who eventually succumb to the temptation of power. But, I think that he also followed their footsteps.”

To review, leaders in a process of change that is fraught with complexities, uncertainty, and limitations may face apparently irreconcilable dilemmas and contradictions in terms of countervailing pressures for organizational implementation and moral purpose. Leader as change agents cope with these tasks differently and with
varying degrees of grace and effectiveness (Kraatz, 2009). It is generally difficult for change agents to be commanding and build warm trusting relationships with people at the same time (Huy, 2000).

Despite these challenges, the strength of the old guard was their resilience. They remained optimistic and persistent (Huy & Mintzberg, 2003: 7). The old guard was able to improve their temporal capabilities by broadening and deepening their understanding of distinct change (SIC), conceptions of timing, and the organization's rhythm under stability and change; by mindfully incorporating plural interests and goals into their change practice; and by developing self-confidence in living and acting in a world of paradoxes. Indeed, organizing and changing inherently require the juxtaposition of contradictions (Lewis, 2000).

**Maintaining relationships with the school district**

Although addressing the internal contradictions and tensions presented daunting obstacles, SCE had to address the challenge of maintaining a working relationship with the school district over time. Even though the founding members viewed the sponsoring school district as hierarchical and authoritarian, SCE had to conform to the school district’s bureaucratic procedures and policies to secure necessary resources and legitimacy and avoid unnecessary demands and conflicts (Chen & O’Mahony, 2009; Cuban et al., 2010; Selznick, 1949). The founding members were willing to conform to the school district as long as this did not compromise the integrity of their innovation.

However, dependence on the school district for vital resources could have made SCE vulnerable to a range of institutional pressures and demands. The old guard was
aware that the more bureaucratically dependent an organization was, the more likely it was to succumb to institutional isomorphic pressures by adopting conventional practices that would dilute their mission (Chen & O’Mahony, 2007; Fink, 1999, 2001; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Huerta, 2002, 2009a, 2009b; Selznick, 1949, 1957; Tyack & Cuban, 1994). The old guard tried to define a proper boundary in its relationship with the school district.

Mr. Rhyu: Do you know what issue I have been struggling with recently?
Researcher (Paul Chung; PC afterwards): No. What is that?
Mr. Rhyu: Maintaining a proper balance between SCE and the sponsoring school district. Have you heard of Han Min-Bok’s poem, “Flowers bloom on every border”?26
PC: No. But, the title sounds very revealing!
Mr. Rhyu: Absolutely. This poem captures the issue that I have been captivated with for a long time! In recent years, I have been trying to maintain the proper distance from the school district so that our school can preserve its integrity and distinct innovation from conventional schooling while meeting the school district’s demands. If the boundaries between our school and the school district are not adequately maintained, SCE will either be co-opted by the school district or risk becoming alienated or repressed by the school district. It’s all about maintaining boundaries!

Mr. Rhyu claimed that only by reinforcing boundaries rather than merging or collapsing them, could SCE make the borders between the school and the district more permeable and easier to infiltrate (O’Mahony & Bechkey, 2008)27. Yet, establishing boundaries

26 Han Min-Bok(2001). “Flowers bloom on every border (모든 경계에는 꽃이 핀다: Mo-Deun Gyeong-Gye-E-Nun KKot-i Pin-Da”).

27 Seo (2003) reported that SCE was viewed as a political “hot potato school” by the sponsoring school district bureaucrats because “it was too radical an innovation to swallow; but too wasteful to discard it all together. In fact, it is difficult to determine who co-opts whom. In other words, it is never easy to judge the extent to which the school district bureaucrats or the activist teachers recognized the ongoing process of infiltration and either tried to exploit or cared to accommodate each other (Falletti, 2009). However, scholars increasingly argue that the assumptions that draw a sharp dichotomy between the interests of challenging and defending parties, and that these interests are presumed to be fixed, should be reconsidered (O’Mahony & Bechky, 2008).
required constant and contingent acts of definition. During the initial stage, SCE’s change occurred at the territorial and functional periphery of the school system in which activist teachers could operate under the radar of the bureaucratic system, where their innovations did not pose a serious threat (Rao et al, 2000; Chen, 2009; Falletti, 2009). However, as SCE’s innovation grew more visible and gained in reputation, the challenge of maintaining the proper boundary between the two became more complicated. SCE could not remain in its insulated space any longer. Rather, it faced pressures to adopt conventional forms and practices (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). Some of these pressures were coercive in the sense that the school district attempted to enforce institutional norms and practices by using its sovereign power and control of resources (Levy & Scully, 2007). Some of the pressures were seductive in that conforming to convention allowed SCE to acquire needed legitimacy and resources (Sauder, 2008).

One way to navigate the coercive challenge was to pursue autonomy at the expense of resources. This pursuit of autonomy proved costly, leaving SCE with few district funds. One telling episode involved recruiting a school librarian. In 2005, the school district informed SCE that it could not place a librarian at SCE because of budget cuts even though other neighboring schools still kept their librarians. SCE’s founding members perceived this to be unfair. Instead of negotiating with the school district for regaining funds for the placement of a librarian, the founding teachers and parents opted

---

Similarly, Clemens (1997) argues "... [political processes] with multiple challengers, diverse tactics, and poorly understood links between action and outcomes (p. 13)," create difficulties for answering the question of who ultimately co-opts whom.
to chip in $10 to $1,000 each to maintain their librarian. This way, SCE could have their librarian for two consecutive years. This demonstrated SCEs collective power to the district and provided SCE with short-term financial stability and a feeling of accomplishment, but at the cost of long-term solvency (Huerta, 2002).

SCE also needed to resist more subtle pressures. In 2004, as SCE gained wide media attention as one of South Korea’s most successful public school change models, the school district was motivated to use the emerging innovative school for its own benefit, giving SCE some leverage. The school district offered SCE magnet school status with which it could secure leadership stability, discretionary staffing, and financial and material resources. It was very tempting for SCE to accept this offer. After a long discussion, the founding teachers decided to decline the district’s offer. Mr. Rhyu recalled that,

“We had to decline the district offer because any concession like this would leave SCE more vulnerable to subsequent disputes and compromise its hard-earned accomplishments.”

In sum, SCE constantly walked a political tightrope in dealing with the relationship with the school district. SCE had to pursue its goal of changing schools from within while meeting the school district’s demands. Otherwise, SCE was subject to the risk of becoming marginalized or domesticated and co-opted by the school district (McLaughlin, 2008; Sawyers and Meyer, 1999; Taylor, 2007). While this symbolic strategy of maintaining the relationship with the school district helped SCE to disguise its intended second-order change by making it appear less threatening than first-order change (Fullan, 2001), the ambiguity and confusion that surrounded the symbolic
practices developed into a more complicated political issue later on (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves et al, 2001; Oakes & Lipton, 2002).

**Advancing legitimacy through visibility**

In the beginning, the activist teachers and founding parents modestly wanted a democratic and caring school where children’s individual needs were respected and where parents and teachers felt empowered to assume active roles in running the school. They were not far-sighted enough to think of advancing a lighthouse innovative school model and change guidelines (Armstrong, 2002; Fullan, 2001; Huerta, 2002; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003; Pierson, 2004). Indeed, just running the school day to day was a daunting challenge; they were uncertain how long their school innovation project would stay afloat.

In this context of uncertainty, the old guard initially sought to gain media coverage because they reasoned that they could attract new members and a “protective shell” (Huerta, 2002: 149) that would ward off the school district’s possible interruption to SCE’s innovative schooling practices (Chen, 2009; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Raeburn, 2004). They wanted to gain legitimacy for their change through media. Regarding this, Mr. Kang said “we pursued publicity in order to establish our innovation rather than merely survive on a daily basis” (Mr. Kang, teacher). Even though SCE was increasingly granted legitimacy by the sponsoring district by being given the award for being the most innovative school in the district multiple times, this was perceived as insufficient by and even a source of disgrace to the teachers. As Mr. Han said that
“This kind of event is a waste of time and energy! Even if we won this contest by chance, it was a shame rather than an honor for a school like SCE!”

The founding teachers were skeptical about the value of gaining legitimacy from a district which they regarded as flawed (Suchman, 1995; Armstrong, 2002). Mr. Rhyu was adept at exploiting the media. He was a seasoned “media-savvy” activist who recognized the political importance of the mass media (Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Deephouse, 2000; Raeburn, 2004; King and Soule 2008; King, 2009; Rodgers, 2009). When he was involved in the education movement, he had become acquainted with many reporters and journalists of the politically left press by using his social skills. He worked with them to present prominent and positive coverage of educational movements on many occasions. Using his years of experience and knowledge, he pursued the media to boost SCE’s reputation and secure free advertising. As a result, the leading political Left newspaper, Han-Gye-Rae newspaper (한겨레 신문: One and the same people’s newspaper) introduced SCE’s innovation with a cover story in its education section in 2004. In this article, the newspaper represented SCE’s innovation as a “miraculous success” within the ailing South Korean public education system, and detailed the concerted efforts of the founding teachers and parents of SCE in making this school innovation possible against all odds (The Small School Network, 2009). This media appearance caught the eye of other mainstream media outlets including political left and right media. In the context of a public school crisis characterized by pervasive expressions of “school collapse” and “classroom crisis” in Korean educational discourse at that time (Kim, 2004), major newspapers and television networks suddenly began focusing on SCE’s innovation -
creating ripple effects that resulted in further visibility (Suchman, 1995; Raeburn, 2004)\(^{28}\) and the possibility of achieving more ambitious change. SCE became a “beacon” for educators and parents who sought alternatives to Korea’s bureaucratic public schools (Kang & Cho, 2010; Raeburn, 2004; Rhyu, 2009)\(^{29}\).

The visibility allowed SCE to gain legitimacy, reputation, stability in student enrollment, and a more favorable bargaining position with the school district. The media appearance also provided the teachers and parents involved with evidence of the significance of their change, with early rewards, and with much-needed energy for sustaining change over time beyond the initiation stage (Huy, 2001; Reay et al., 2006).

However, the media coverage that provided SCE with durability and visibility ironically brought about potential risks and introduced new challenges to SCE’s development (Corbett & Wilson, 1990). A growing number of parents made pilgrimages to SCE every day and willingly waited over a year for a chance to enroll their children in SCE. Whenever SCE appeared in the media, the school’s daily business was interrupted due to incessant inquiries from visitors in person and by telephone. The media limelight attracted too many parents who were unfamiliar with SCE’s philosophy. The founding members were concerned that such a sudden influx of newcomers who were unprepared for SCE’s participatory innovations would dilute SCE’s community-building efforts and

\(^{28}\) Suchman (1995) notes that organizations sometimes gain legitimacy by manipulating and challenging, rather than conforming to, existing institutions.

\(^{29}\) According to the KINDS (Korean Information Network Database System: http://www.kinds.or.kr), from 2004-2010, SCE appeared in local and national newspapers at least 153 times.
hard-earned innovation and dampen the members’ commitment. More pragmatically, housing values skyrocketed and the small school was deluged with students. Members therefore started to reject many media requests to report about SCE.

Some parents and teachers criticized Mr. Rhyu for manipulating the perception of SCE. They argued that Mr. Rhyu presented an exaggerated image of SCE that was saturated with positive and normative values and covered up many problems (Christensen, 2003; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Westphal & Zajac, 1994, 1995). In light of this, some teachers said that “SCE’s innovation is all about fantasy!” (Mr. Yoon); “SCE is a bubble and a mirage” (Mr. Woo); and “some of SCE’s programs are the height of hypocrisy!” (Mr. Han). In reaction to these criticisms, Mr. Rhyu, as a seasoned media-savvy activist, elaborated his distinctive view of the media as a key vehicle for constructing symbols and transmitting them to the masses.

“The media is meant to be sensational. The media is a more suitable instrument for setting off a detonator than for delivering the truth. If we expect the media to deliver truths as they really are, it’s too much; the media simply can’t do that! How could a one page article or a two minute news clip convey the complicated truth to us in the living room? Instead, once media alert otherwise disinterested people to both the urgent problems and possibility of change, then it’s time for us to take action! Purist teachers and idealist parents don’t understand media mechanisms. They are preoccupied with the match between symbols and actions and

30 The student enrollment increased from 110 in 2002 to 157 in 2008. In addition, the deposit for the lease of a poorly equipped two-bed room apartment increased almost two hundred percent from 50,000,000 won (approximately $50,000) to 100,000,000 won (approximately $100,000). Considering that the average deposit to lease a decent two-bed room in nearby cities was approximately 100,000,000 won (around $100,000), the price was unreasonably expensive.

31 While the old guards knew the power of symbolism, the other teachers (the new guard) tended to ignore the power of symbolism.
how to turn symbols into practices, which are good, I acknowledge, but their approach is too naïve to understand the tricky business of maintaining balance between symbols and practices in the real world”
(Mr. Rhyu, teacher)

Mr. Rhyu’s distinctive perspective regarding the media and the tension this created between him and other teachers echoed Christensen’s (2003) analysis of the role of symbols in innovation:

“Innovators may be seen as having ambiguous plans and as trying to compensate for this by using symbols. They may be accused of promising more action and implementation than they can deliver or they may encounter problems with subordinates who cannot distinguish between talk and action and take the symbols as their face value.” (p. 8)

Overall, while the use of symbols did have the potential to arouse enthusiasm and provide legitimacy and support for SCE’s innovation (Elshbach & Sutton, 1992; Westphal & Zajac, 1995; Zilber, 2009), over time this could have generated anxiety, conflicts, and subsequent contradictions (Contu, 2008; Fotaki, 2009; Hargreaves, 1994). A wide gap between symbols and the practices could have led SCE to paralysis. The overselling of SCE’s outer-shell (or “protective shell” (Huerta, 2002)) to the external world while SCE’s inner-core was decoupled from it laid too much burden on the shoulder of SCE’s founding members, resulting in compartmentalization of their lives and further jeopardizing the stability of SCE (Armstrong, 2002; Farjoun, 2002; Huerta, 2002; Seo & Creed, 2002)\(^32\). Furthermore, it was unlikely that this symbolic approach in which appearance was everything and substance was nothing could uphold strict decoupling

\(^{32}\) Mr. Rhyu once cynically and penetratingly confessed that “Sometimes I felt that all my effort to change SCE was much like masturbating. If I viewed SCE as a substantive gain or solid success, it’s an either simply a misunderstanding or a “delusion of grandeur.” This resonated with the self-indulgent nature of SCE’s innovation (Kets De Vries, 2005; Kraatz, 2009).
between symbols and practices over an extended period time (Hernes, 2005; Hirsch & Bermiss, 2009; Tilcsik, 2010; Maclean, 2010).

**Theorizing change: success beyond expectation?**

In this section, I examine the way in which the old guard conceptualized its change and linked it to a broader change initiative. In the initiation stage, the founding teachers and parents modestly wanted a democratic and caring school where children’s individual needs were respected and they felt empowered to assume active roles in running the school. They neither wanted to advance a lighthouse innovative school model and change guidelines nor did they aspire to be interpreted as doing such (Armstrong, 2002; Fullan, 2001; Huerta, 2002; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003; Pierson, 2004). Indeed, the day-to-day running of the school was a daunting challenge at the beginning. They were uncertain how long their school innovation project would stay afloat, and were not particularly interested in promoting an innovative school model. However, with the concerted efforts of the founding members, SCE survived many challenges and metamorphosed into a very successful innovative school model that received a lot of attention from newspapers and television. Many media represented SCE’s innovation as an “almost miraculous success” within the South Korean public education system (The Small School Network, 2009).

SCE’s successful innovation was particularly inspiring for those teachers and parents who had worked hard to transform their own schools only to see their efforts fail. One activist teacher who benchmarked SCE’s innovation to improve his own school said “when I heard the story of SCE’s innovation, it was so exciting that my spine tingled!” It
is no wonder that the innovation spread to small schools in rural areas that had faced similar situations. In 2004, nine of these schools dispersed all around the nation launched a network (“the Small School Solidarity”) to share knowledge and experiences and enhance their chances of survival by working together (Kang & Cho, 2010; The Small School Network, 2009). This network gradually grew into a bigger network of schools including more than forty urban schools and two hundred individual educators seeking to learn the alternative school change model and apply it to their own schools. SCE’s innovation “opened the gate” (Tarrow, 1991, p. 180) for other schools to initiate their own innovations by setting a precedent that demonstrated the legitimacy of innovation and by signaling the potential vulnerability of school districts to this kind of challenge (Falletti, 2009; McAdam, 1995; Minkoff, 1997; Raeburn, 2004; Tarrow, 1998). In institutional terms, a school change that breaks ground in one organization can spread across an organizational field as other similar organizations feel pressure to imitate the changes that the original organization adopted (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Raeburn 2004). SCE’s case shows that a local change that occurs within a school system due to the persistence of the activist teachers can eventually spread to a large number of schools through processes of isomorphism.

As the old guard recognized the potential of SCE’s change for a broader and system-wide change, and given the internal contradictions that existed even at the height of the school’s acceptance (Onoma, 2010), they became more committed to the symbolic approach to advance their change to a wider audience while containing the contradictions. The original goal of SCE’s change substantially shifted from innovation of a single
school to an innovative effort to change whole systems (Fullan, 2001; Selznick, 1949; Zbaracki, 1998; Zilber, 2002). This was consistent with Fullan’s (2001) finding that “successful implementation consists of some transformation or continual development of initial ideas” (p. 105). In order for the change to become more widely adopted, the old guard sought to theorize the change. According to Greenwood et al., (2002),

“Theorization is the development and specification of abstract categories and the elaboration of chains of cause and effect. Such theoretical accounts simplify and distill the properties of new practices and explain the outcomes they produce. In effect, theorization is the process whereby localized deviations from prevailing conventions become abstracted (Abbott, 1988) and thus made available in simplified form for wider adoption (p. 60)”.

The old guard re-conceptualized SCE’s innovation as “symbolic innovation” by emphasizing the constitutive power of symbols (Armstrong, 2002; Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Campbell, 2004; Espeland & Sauder, 2009). As Mr. Rhyu noted:

“I’m doing kind of a cultural (symbolic) movement here. By changing the culture of school, I believe that we can transform the bureaucratic and test-driven practices of schools even when the structures and arrangements of the schools remain intact. What SCE’s change has demonstrated is the message that it is possible to transform schools this way… Although SCE may not yet be perfect, it is still meaningful and valuable because SCE became a powerful symbol of the possibility of change.”

This symbolic strategy was based on the old guard’s belief that it would ultimately induce substantive change in the long run (Campbell, 2004; Fullan, 2001; North, 1990). In this way, the old guard justified SCE’s limited substantive change as a symbolic innovation. As SCE matured, Mr. Rhyu became more inclined to use the power of symbols. He

33 Invoking the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda who explained that a metaphor is the best vehicle to seduce a woman, Mr. Rhyu said that he always longed for a metaphor of his own that could epitomize his life and activism in a succinct way.
wove meaning into what SCE needed to get by. He understood the role of symbols in the affective and relational domains and used them to sustain SCE and neutralize resistance. He interpreted the relationship between symbols and actions in a complementary way; transcending conventional standards of consistency between what is said and what is done (Brunsson, 2002; Westphal & Zajac, 1994, 1995). By using the proverbial words “little drops of water make the mighty ocean” the old guard added a time dimension to create more tolerance for the inconsistencies between symbols and practices (Kraatz, 2009) and to generate faith that symbols would turn into corresponding practices over time (Brunsson, 2002; Hallett, 2010).

However, this emphasis on the symbolic value of SCE’s change inadvertently supplanted its technical value (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). As institutional theorists, notably Selznick (1957), argue, this process may become the process of (symbolic) institutionalization whereby a practice or change becomes institutionalized or “infused with value beyond its technical requirements of the task at hand” (p. 17). If and when the visions and goals promoted by symbolic activities are not met with corresponding actions and substantive practices, this may delegitimize the credibility of the change agents and of the change (Campbell, 2004; Denis et al., 2001; Kraatz, 2009; North, 1990; Selznick, 1945, 1957; Tilesik, 2010; Zbaracki, 1998). However, the more profound problem of symbolic change is not that symbolic innovation may be manipulative, because the people involved are quick to see through such manipulation or contrivances (Hargreaves, 1994: 90). Rather, symbolic change may become a taken-for-granted way of doing things possessing its own self-sustaining importance and legitimacy over time (DiMaggio &
Powell, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Hallett, 2010; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zbaracki, 1998). Not much is known about how innovation evolves from a clear technical intervention into a mere symbol of change (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994). Treating symbolic change as a process, rather than an outcome, and exploring how it unfolds over time might help change agents make more informed decisions about how much inconsistency between symbolic goals and substantive practices they should encourage and tolerate.

**Lack of instructional innovation and cohesive curriculum development**

Like many other change initiatives, the SCE case highlights disparities between espoused symbolic change and enacted practices of implementation. This section addresses the phenomenon of a lag between organizational innovation and instructional development. The foundational assumption of SCE’s participatory democratic innovation was that if teachers, parents, and students were empowered with the ability to run a school in their own way, instructional needs would be better met and all other issues would fall into place without specifically geared efforts on instructional innovation (Huerta, 2002). As long as parents were convinced that the old guard had personal credibility and professional knowledge, they were content to leave decisions about instructional development up to them while they, as parents, focused their efforts more on other school issues such as school events, maintaining facilities, and parent-teacher workshops (Meyer & Rowan, 1983). Because of this underlying belief, the old guard was rarely confronted by parents about instructional issues.

However, after almost eight years since the founding SCE had not yet focused on instructional development and a cohesive new curriculum since the founders had
continuously struggled to sustain the fragile participatory organization. This situation created a lingering sense of distress about the lag between organizational and instructional progress. Mr. Park, a teacher, said,

“One day a colleague teacher in a nearby school told me that even though he was deeply impressed by the innovative decision making processes and parent-teacher relationships, he was frustrated with SCE’s lack of progress in pedagogical areas. To be frank, I didn’t have much to say to my colleague. Indeed, I think that the lack of pedagogical innovation was SCE’s Achilles’ heel.”

This sentiment was ubiquitous and a source of recurring distress among the parents and teachers, especially from 2008 onwards. However, from the inception, the motivation that spurred SCE’s change was not to advance instructional innovation or develop a new curriculum. Rather, it arose as a reaction to what it did not want to be. The founding teachers and parents wanted a school that would realize their espoused values of familial and caring community, celebrate parent participation, and cultivate democratic education. Furthermore, under the highly standardized national curriculum in South Korea, there was not much room for instructional innovation in the first place. As a consequence, the founding teachers creatively added new layers of innovative practices in “after-school curriculum activities, or sheltered time for creativity or interdisciplinary studies within an otherwise standardized environment” (Hargreaves, 2009: 97).

This strategy can be seen as what Thelen and Mahoney call institutional layering that can eventually lead to consequential change such as more flexible conditions of teaching, learning and leadership even in an era of test-driven reform (Hargreaves, 2009: 97). However, the efforts for creative instructional progress were gradually superseded by the more pressing organizational governance agenda in the form of parent
participation, empowerment, and democratic community (Fullan, 2001). This emphasis on organizational governance by the old guard was rooted in their ideology of teacher activism and educational movements (Oakes et al., 1998; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Sachs, 2001). They justified their efforts by saying that too much focus on instructional change might sidetrack the more pressing issues of sustaining the fragile organization in terms of organizational structures and governance.

Instructional innovation required specialized skills and knowledge in which the old guard was not particularly strong. They were superb activists, but not well equipped with instructional skills. As the old guard became more committed to innovation in governance, they inadvertently paid insufficient attention to pedagogical innovation. Moreover, the activist teachers could not do all things at once. When they voluntarily undertook administrative tasks that were normally carried out by principals to enhance empowerment and democratization, their energy for the classroom and pedagogical innovation was easily drained (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). They had to run the school and lead the school community while teaching their classes like other teachers. In addition, in reality, parents never participated to the extent the founding members idealistically anticipated, further increasing the teachers’ administrative burdens. Mr. Rhyu said,

“I am deeply satisfied with what I am doing here at SCE. But I don’t think the configuration of SCE in which teachers carry out dual task of managing the school and teaching children simultaneously is normal or desirable. Do you know what kind of a school I really desire? I really want work at a school in which I can only devote myself wholeheartedly
to my class and my children without worrying about administrative issues." (Quote from Lee, 2007: 18)

SCE’s vision of “a small and beautiful school that cultivated authentic learning and genuine life” was too vague as a direction for developing instructional programs. Without cohesive and coherent guidelines of what this vision meant, even though the founding teachers worked on improving pedagogical practices, their efforts were easily dissipated and misdirected (Chen, 2009; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). As a consequence, these founding teachers engaged in endless discussions about what authentic and genuine pedagogical practices looked like and what they were supposed to do to achieve the goals, without producing much in the way of tangible outcomes or visible progress (Polletta, 2002, 2005). Furthermore, as its symbolic form of innovation gained widespread currency among reform-minded teachers, parents, and policy-makers, there was no specific external pressure for concrete instructional development.

As the symbolic form of SCE’s change became taken-for-granted, the founders were less likely to attend to further development, including instructional development (Green et al., 2009). While this delayed the development of tangible change and implementation, the change agents could also focus on broader issue such as system level change. Over time, symbolic change can ironically enacted substantive change: the focus of chapter six (Denis et al., 1996; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006, 2009; Onoma, 2010; Seo et al., 2004; Zbaracki, 1998).

---

34 Burnout is particularly problematic for startup and innovative organizations in which actors may overwork to compensate for insufficient resources and underdeveloped procedures (Barker, 1999; Chen, 2009)
Conclusion

To discover how SCE sustained its innovation over time requires examining what happened during the initial stages as well as when SCE’s stabilized. This section took a step in this direction. Findings from this chapter demonstrated that SCE both maintained its original mission and sustained its change by actively enhancing and skillfully coordinating participation, exercising resilient leadership with moral purpose, navigating tricky relations between SCE and the district office, and theorizing and amplifying change into a broader organizational field through networking and media.

However, despite the good intentions to run the school with the principles of participatory democracy and non-hierarchical decision-making, SCE was not immune to the well-known pathologies of underorganizing characterized by masked hegemony, tyrannical pressure for group conformity, panoptic surveillance, arbitrary rules and procedures and incessant firefighting (Freeman, 1972; Barker, 1993, 1999; Polletta, 2002, 2010; Chen, 2009), which were far removed from the original mission and promise of SCE’s innovation (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). SCE experienced conflicts over its core principals of participatory democracy and collectivist decision-making as it matured due to poorly-defined rules and procedures.

This discussion of recurrent conflicts sets the stage for the chapter six in which I address the institutionalization or re-bureaucratization of the SCE’s innovation (Greif & Leid, 2004; Pierson, 2004; Olsen, 2009; Styhre, 2006; Tsai, 2006).

SCE’s paradoxical success fraught with contradictions and internal problems presents a fascinating puzzle for those wishing to understand the organizational forces
that hold SIC together. Contrary to conventional assumptions of successful educational change free of conflict and division, SCE’s successes begat contradictions which were not paralyzing. Indeed, the successes and contradictions seem inextricably interconnected (Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). In isolation, the change processes would have been insufficient and incomplete (Armstrong, 2002). The change processes led to consequential change only because they occurred in a proper sequence and pace (Armstrong, 2002; Huy, 2001; Pierson, 2004; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). We can better understand the complexities and paradoxes that are common to many contemporary educational changes by looking at SIC’s quintessential nature (Fink, 1999; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves, 2003).
Chapter 6
Institutionalizing change

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the institutionalization of change. It begins with the rise of the new guard. Next, I examine the introduction of bureaucratic and more formalized mechanisms into SCE’s participatory democratic form of innovation. I highlight how SCE struggled to manage tensions between the two competing logics and I propose a way to synthesize them, building a sustainable hybrid whereby the school might have attained a balance between enhancing participatory democracy and enabling substantive innovation in terms of instruction as well as governance, rather than privileging one end at the expense of another.

The changing of the guard

The rise of the new guard: endogenous change

The continued growth and evolution of SCE combined with changes in the political environment, the departure of the old guard and the cumulative weight of internal contradictions made the old guard’s way of change increasingly vulnerable to an attack and fueled the rise of the new guard (Voss & Farjoun, 2002; Zilber, 2002; Onoma, 2009). The members became increasingly concerned with achieving authentic innovation and were increasingly critical of SCE which they saw as being inauthentic and oversold. While the quest for authenticity had been a recurring preoccupation and foundational belief at SCE, in the aftermath of the draining leadership succession crisis and the departure of its charismatic leaders, its importance had been intensified
(Hochschild, 1983; Starratt, 2005). The new guard, Mr. Yoon and Mr. Han, with new interpretations of SCE’s situation and new strategies for improving SCE, came to wield their influence as a result of these. They had become embittered by the old guard’s double talk and superficial innovation that had not produced tangible outcomes. The new guard thought that the old guard’s symbolic approach consisted of too many empty promises. They were particularly concerned with authenticity (Selznick, 1957; Kraatz & Block, 2008; Kraatz, 2009) and regarded SCE’s innovation as inauthentic, oligarchic, alienating, and bubble-like. Whereas the old guard attempted to cover up the incomplete nature of SCE’s innovation, the starting point for the new guard was the candid exposure of inconsistency between ideals and practices (Hoedemaekers, 2009; Kraatz, 2009). This critique of the old guard led to a search for alternative ways of approaching school innovation that were consistent with SCE’s original vision of change. The new guard struggled to create ways of acting where a desired school innovation, characterized by caring, democracy, and authenticity, would be present in the process of implementing change (Armstrong, 2002; Leach, 2009). Mr. Yoon, who was one of the founding members of SCE, returned to SCE in 2009 just two months before Mr. Rhyu left for a new position. He had been a committed member of the KTU for more than twenty years.

35 Ironically, Peter Fleming (2009) claims that authenticity (e.g. “Just be yourself”) is a key element of the new neo-liberalism that is deployed as a way of engineering new forms of legitimacy and new sources of social values and innovation. In the context of neo-liberalism, he argues we need to take this development more seriously.

36 To the innocent teachers, their change efforts were similar to self-correction provoked by the desire to atone for feelings of guilt and shame (Gould, 2002; Armstrong, 2002). They talked about the imperative of the renewal of SCE in these tones on many occasions.
He was also a best-selling author of Korean children’s literature. He identified himself as an activist who had not been properly appreciated by dominant activists like the old guard. He said that he had been actively involved in developing a progressive way of teaching and curriculum development rather than fighting in the street. He thought that the dominant activists always devalued this kind of activism. He further argued that they never respected his efforts as a real movement and thought that these were minor or even risky issues that might sidetrack them from the urgency of their politically-driven movements.

When this kind of activism was accepted within the dominant movement, it required the subordination of instruction to politics. During the period of his service from 2001 to 2004, he had refused to subordinate instruction to governance and relationship-building strategies. The old guard repressed Mr. Yoon’s critique on the ground that the success of SCE depended on forming a “single unified front” (Dyrness, 2008) in which there was no room for internal conflict or critique. They even called him an “egoist” who lived in his own isolated world. Having gone through intimidation and shunning within SCE, Mr. Yoon found that attempting to make a space for himself within SCE was simply too difficult and painful. Instead, he decided to leave SCE altogether in 2004. Although it was his decision to leave SCE, he was virtually expelled by the old guard.

Even after leaving SCE, Mr. Yoon was tormented by the guilty feeling that he left behind friends, coworkers, and students (Klatch, 2004). In addition, he suffered from a diminished sense of self-esteem due to the fact that he was a “quitter” (Klatch, 2004). Due to his traumatic experience he said that he never paid a visit to SCE again, even
when his son, who attended SCE, begged him to visit to see his old classmates. Instead, he had arduously engaged in a teacher activist network of Korean language teachers to develop an alternative curriculum and texts for Korean language. He served as the president of the network from 2005-2007. Leading this large-scale national teacher network gave him a broader perspective on educational change and helped him see beyond the microcosm of unionized activists. He also recognized that he could learn a lot from non-activist teachers and even bureaucrats, thus overcoming the sharp dichotomy between activism and bureaucracy. Furthermore, he became less caught up in the traditional politically-driven activism and became more confident with instruction and curriculum oriented activism. Through these experiences Mr. Yoon metamorphosed into a resilient teacher leader with enhanced skills and new visions (Voss & Sherman, 2000; Collins, 2003). Mr. Yoon returned to SCE in 2009 with ambition and expected to revitalize the school with these skills and strategies.

Meanwhile, Mr. Han had stayed at SCE since 2003 (except 2004-2006 during which he stayed in Canada while his wife pursued a masters’ degree37). While Mr. Yoon invoked authenticity, Mr. Han was more interested in the “public good.” Mr. Han said to me that,

“When I was a teachers’ college student, I was fascinated by the social democracy of Scandinavian countries and this interest in the “public good” led me into joining the KTU.”

37 Mr. Han said that this experience gave him much needed recuperation and new perspectives about education that were helpful in implementing change at SCE.
Although the adversarial nature of the KTU did not fit perfectly with his beliefs, since there was no teacher’s union advocating social democracy in the 1990s, he had to settle for second best. He met one of the old guard, Mr. Kang, who was the president of a local branch of the KTU and his relationship with Mr. Kang brought him to SCE in 2003. With regard to the relationship, Mr. Han said that,

“I always tried to keep a certain distance from Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu while cooperating with them as much as I could because I knew that my personality and ideology don’t fit quite well for their ideology and accompanying strategies.”

While Mr. Yoon considered him an activist, Mr. Han insisted that “I am not an activist like Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang. I just want to live up to my beliefs.” Mr. Han drew a distinction between being an activist and doing activism and avoided the activist identity on the ground that he was not tireless and selfless and that he did not want to bear the heavy burden of being activist like Mr. Rhyu or Mr. Kang. In fact, in South Korea the term “activist” is a loaded word and it was hard to be an activist teacher openly, considering the conservative tendency of the profession in South Korea. This self-identification made it difficult for him to completely devote himself to the old guard’s way. For this reason, he said that he was viewed by the old guard as a “too logical” person who would not fully commit to the cause of educational movement. In other words, he had been an “inside-outsider” within SCE.

Mr. Han was flexible, resilient and compromising enough to survive SCE’s ebbs and flows under the old guard’s reign. He had also been viewed by teachers and parents as “clumsy, naïve, and having ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).” He said that this incongruity between his inner intelligence and outward appearance might
have contributed to his longevity at SCE. He often said “what is seemingly the most non-political action ironically could be the most political thing!” This idea was at somewhat odds with the premises of the old guard. While Mr. Han had been on thin ice due to his ambivalent and half-hearted attitude, he still attempted to address contradictions and transform SCE by employing passive actions such as voicing his concerns (Oliver, 1991; Farjoun, 2002). What finally spurred him to step forward was Mr. Yoon, who brought a new vision with him and was willing to take political risks (Voss & Sherman, 2000). Before Mr. Yoon’s arrival, it was unconceivable for Mr. Han to pursue alternative ways of innovation that could address internal contradictions and inadequacies in opposition to the old guard’s orthodoxies. However, with Mr. Yoon’s arrival and enhanced capacities, it became possible for the new guard to seek to resolve the internal contradictions and pursue disruptive changes at SCE (Farjoun, 2002).

With the strengthening of the new guard, the old guard’s practices became much more vulnerable. The old practices became susceptible to change because the old guard lost some of its authority after the painful succession crisis. The new guard’s ideas presented a radical departure from the premises of the old guard. However, the new guard was aware that it was the old guard’s efforts that had made SCE’s innovation and that the platform they had made was an invaluable resource that the new guard wanted to appropriate (Meyer & Kretschmer, 2007; Lounsbury & Schneiberg, 2009). The new guard’s different views, interpretations, and skills, allowed disruptive change that revitalized SCE (Voss & Sherman, 2000; Armstrong, 2002; Farjoun, 2002; Seo & Creed, 2002). However, the change initiatives made by the new guard did not lead smoothly to
the desired goals. Much of the agenda advocated by the innocent teachers was at odds
with the diehard old guard’s efforts. This created a paralyzing internal crisis within SCE
(Armstrong, 2002).

**Creative recombination of formalization with participatory democracy**

In the early stage, SCE had emphasized community, participation, democracy and
relationships, but the new guard was disenchanted with these idealistic concepts. The new
guard raised questions about how a caring and inclusive community generated exclusion,
internal division, and alienation; how democratic leadership relied on undemocratic
means such as backstage fire fighting; how an empowered community achieved so little
instructional innovation. As pragmatic solutions to these problems, the new guard
claimed that SCE should stress authenticity, public good, instructional innovation, and a
redeployment of formalized and impartial rules, procedures, and routines (Haveman &
Rao, 1997; Haveman et al., 2007). The new guard strategically exploited the incongruity
between the members’ stated values and their actual behaviors. As Mr. Han noted:

“SCE’s fundamental problems are too many empty promises and lip-
service that is not accompanied by corresponding practices”

The new guard exploited this inner conflict by providing individual members with the
opportunity to reconcile their moral imperatives and actual behaviors (Hargrave & Van
de Ven, 2009). This authentically expressive strategy has not been well considered in the
literature of change, but is starting to be regarded as both important and intertwined with
more instrumental tactics (Fullan, 2002).

To put this strategy into practice, in May 2009, the new guard launched a series of
open and reflective discussions for in-depth diagnosis and reassessment of SCE’s
direction with all members. These were one-week long events that were held from early evening to late night. The new guard encouraged parents to talk about any problems and criticism they held about SCE. The underlying reasons for having this discussion were based on the new guard’s diagnosis of the problems and their proposed solutions. Mr. Yoon said that,

“I think that SCE has been dominated by the “culture of avoidance” that did not raise certain topics for fear of offending the old guard and in the hope of preserving harmony. I think this attitude had been only allowing some people to act in controlling ways and led to oligarchical tendencies.”

The new guard particularly emphasized that the members should abandon the habit of attempting to solve problems in the background by relying on informal relationships rather than formal and transparent procedures. Mr. Han noted that,

“Some of members’ habitual reliance on informal problem solving have subverted the formal procedures and public good and made SCE more like a club-like organization (See also Haveman, et al., 2007; Chen, 2009).

Similarly, at a PTA meeting, Mr. Yoon remarked:

“How should teachers and parents meet personally for any issue that is not about children? I don’t think we need to. If teachers and parents have to meet for children’s matter, they can always meet at school, not a restaurant or a pub. We, teachers, have our own family lives. Please do not expect us to meet after 5 p.m. We are not supermen like Mr. Kang and Mr. Rhyu 38. I don’t think that their way is desirable and even sustainable.”

The new guard attempted to fulfill the ideals of professionalism characterized by impartiality and the public good by advancing formal procedures and rules in decision making and by disrupting the entrenched routines that valued informal and intimate

38 As this demonstrates that the new guard did not try to be heroes and were more likely to avoid the chronic problem of burnout (Barker, 1999; Chen, 2009).
procedures and face-to-face relationships. In so doing, they challenged the prevailing view of SCE’s values that emphasized close relationships between teachers and parents and strong parent participation.

When the new guard pursued this goal, several staff members voiced their concerns. For example, the new principal Choi explained:

“It’s similar to entering a political minefield. I don’t know why we need to do this in the first place, let alone whether it works or not. We’d better not rush into the minefield too deep!”

While this was a seemingly radical departure from the old guard’s way, it did not mean that the new guard abandoned all forms of informal relationships. Rather, they wanted to rectify the problems of the small groups and factions that dominated the decision making processes behind the scenes. Mr. Han explained

“We do not attempt to discard all sorts of informal and intimate relationship-based approaches and parent participation. Rather, we just want to replace the informal relationship-based culture with that of “transparency” and “responsible participation” within the impartial and formalized setting in which members do not need to solicit informal cliques or inner circle for information and influence any longer at SCE.”

The new guard redeployed rules, and procedures as “practical solutions” to the entangled problems of alienation, favoritism, and oligarchical degeneration of SCE from which they perceived the school had suffered (Haveman et al., 2007; Michels, 2001[1912]; Voss & Sherman, 2000)\(^\text{39}\). The redeployment of these measures could be

---

\(^{39}\) Chen (2009) suggests that “growing organizations, including those with collectivist practices, will formalize as they encounter underorganizing problems.” Like these organizations, at least at the beginning, the new guard seemed to inadvertently trigger bureaucratization to address emerging problems as SCE matured.
understood as the evolving response of the new guard who struggled to reconcile their sense of participatory democracy and authenticity. Mr. Yoon said that,

“These formal procedures and practices would enhance participatory democracy and authenticity.”

In order to curb resistance, Mr. Yoon portrayed these formal measures as safeguards of the public good and transparency. In contrast to the old guard who emphasized enthusiasm about SCE’s change, the new guard argued that

“Although enthusiasm and mission are important, relying on these measures alone is not enough to sustain an organization over an extended period” (Mr. Han, teacher).

Instead, they argued that too much dependence on these fleeting means and neglect of formalization would end up generating a vicious cycle of corrosive relationship, concealed hegemony, and incessant fire-fighting (Chen, 2009). The new guard’s strategy was consistent with Staggenborg’s (1988) claims that

“Collectivist and movement organizations were inevitably tyrannized by informal elites without professionalization and formalization and proposed that in order to overcome the oligarchical transformation of non-bureaucratic organizations social movement scholars distinguish types of formalized organizations rather than equating them all together as “bureaucratic.”

Similarly, Clemens and Minkoff (2004) argue that

“In some cases, formal organization may be associated with more radical actions (Rucht, 1999) or even the reinvigoration of organizations that had succumbed to quiescent oligarchy (Voss & Sherman, 2000). Within formal organizations, movements like mobilizations may generate significant change (Katzenstein, 1998; Scully & Creed, 1999) (p. 156).”

In addition, the new guard claimed that SCE could bring more energy to instruction and curriculum by establishing organizational routines and procedures.
Without clear and consistent curriculum/instructional guidelines, keeping SCE operating in the basic sense demanded too much energy and time of the staff members. Mr. Yoon explained:

“There are so many things to discuss during the faculty meeting—school events, school visit requests, the rush of student applications, addressing conflicts among parents, community relationships, etc. Thus, we paid too little attention to instruction. Once we established the solid procedures and routines regarding these issues, teachers could focus more on teaching and learning without worrying about other issues.”

Some parents who were still loyal to the old guard and missing the “good old days” attempted to wield power to stop the new direction of the new guard. A parent hardliner posted a provocative article on the school’s website:

“It’s time to rise and act, SCE! The instrumental and inhumane attempt to formalize SCE will ruin all our hard-earned participatory democracy and beloved community!” (Chae-Yeon’s father).

With regard to the new guard’s drive for formalization, Mr. Rhyu’s initial reaction was dismissive. He noted:

“I think Mr. Yoon’s plan is misguided. His diagnosis might be correct, but his proposed solution is wrong. It’s like he is setting about a new task that is way beyond his capacity. Furthermore, the late night discussions are too much for ordinary parents. It will only cause participatory fatigue! Teachers are supposed to do their job. That’s what they are paid for. All they need is to try to “communicate” better with parents rather than ask them to come and decide everything together. That’s the real meaning of participatory democracy in the real world! In this sense, I think the real meaning of SCE is more a ‘solace’ than anything else to parents with broken hearts within the South Korean education system (Mr. Rhyu, a teacher).”

The aversion to formalization and bureaucratization is a typical reaction in organizations aspiring to alternative democratic governance and collectivist decision-making. It is also resonates with classic social movement scholarship. As early as Robert Michels’s
(2001[1912]) famous analysis of the iron law of oligarchy, social movement scholars have maintained that to the extent that formalization and bureaucratization of social movements reduce spontaneity and disruption, these organizations tend to regress to conventional and routine organizations. Piven and Cloward (1977) claimed that organizations are antithetical to effective mobilization. The dream of intimate and informal relationship and beloved community dies hard at the SCE (Mansbridge & Karpowitz, 2005). In reaction to these criticisms, Mr. Han argued that SCE needed to reconsider the nostalgic and idealistic interpretation of participation and distinguish between good participation and interference. He noted:

“What ‘good old days’? Good old days have never existed at SCE! Decreased participation? Ironically, that’s what SCE should bring back. I think that SCE’s parents need to curb their enthusiasm and empty words that are not accompanied with actual action. Here, under the good intention of enhancing democratic participation and building a caring community, parent participation has been romanticized too much, to the extent that it has resulted in disabling confusion and interference. It’s time to make a distinction “between participation and interference” at SCE so that this school can be run in a more sustainable way.”

Similarly, Mr. Yoon acknowledged that the emphasis on formalized rules and procedures would weaken participation and erode intimate relationships among members. He also admitted that he did not pay enough attention to relationship building with the longstanding members. Mr. Yoon said that,

“Since I have been back at SCE for less than a year, I have had little time and opportunity to establish trustful relationships with parent members”

The informal and relationship-based approach enjoyed by the old guard was closed to Mr. Yoon at least for a while until he built relationships, and the formalized approach he
pursued was the only practical option that remained at that moment (Hallett, 2006). But Mr. Yoon was optimistic about the future direction of SCE.

“With more time, I think that the relational cracks existing between the new teachers and the longstanding parents will be filled through the accumulation of mutual trust and the demonstration of authenticity rather than through the activist teachers’ political savvy and thick-skin people skills. I am optimistic that SCE will eventually pull together in a better direction. It just takes time, maybe one or two years, maybe more.” (Mr. Yoon, teacher)

The redeployment of principal’s leadership

After going through the unprepared leadership succession and the sudden departure of Mr. Rhyu, the new guard was preoccupied with the question of how they could improve SCE’s leadership structure so that it would outlast just a few strong charismatic leaders. Given the high priority of circumscribing the formal authority of the principal and emphasizing normative participatory democracy in SCE’s earlier stage, the old guard did not prescribe what leadership and administrative arrangement could support sustainable participatory democratic innovation in a public school context and or how it could gain synergistic capacity and expertise of formal leadership without undermining democratic control (Olsen, 2008). On the contrary, emphasizing that dependence on charismatic leadership was unsustainable, they argued that SCE should establish an institutionalized leadership initiative. On the basis of their own experience with the old guard, they were aware that the lack of formal authority would not automatically bring about a more democratic leadership, but might instead give rise to “teacher autocracy” in which domineering behaviors would be deployed to fill the leadership void. Under this situation, they recognized that it would generate as much stress as they would have
undergone in a conventional school (Barker, 1993; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; Scully & Levy, 2007; Denis et al., 2003). Their experience spurred them to reconsider the meaning and the nature of leadership in the context of an innovative school embracing a participatory democratic approach.

Meanwhile, from the very beginning of his incumbency in 2008, the new principal, Mr. Choi, was expected to follow the footsteps of his predecessor Principal Lee by becoming a “hands-off” principal. Mr. Rhyu and his clique members kept trying to box him in his office. He seemed to comply with the members’ expectations. He was perceived as a “head-bowed” principal by the members (Park, 2009). He was more like a “silhouette” principal who lived in limbo until the powerful Mr. Rhyu left SCE in 2009 (Farquhar, 1991). According to Mr. Woo, “many members believed that he was an interim principal until Mr. Rhyu was promoted to SCE principal.” In contrast to the old guard who actively attempted to delimit Principal Lee’s authority and power, the new guard persuaded Principal Choi to exercise more leadership and engage in more activities. Based on their belief that formal authority could foster genuine participation and sustainable school change, they sought to reinstate the formal basis of the principal’s leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Harris et al., 2007; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007; Polletta, 2002).

“We kept persuading Principal Choi to actively engage in more school activities as a leader. We believed that we could do a much better job with his expertise and experience.” (Mr. Han, teacher)

Similarly, Mr. Yoon said,
“During many occasions over the course of my career, I recognized that there are many things that only an experienced principal could observe while everyone else fails to notice them. So, I am trying to learn from their experience and expertise in these areas even when I do not always agree with them in other areas.”

In the beginning, Principal Choi had reservations about actively engaging in school decision making because he was not sure whether it would be good or not in SCE’s context. However, as Principal Lee and teachers developed trust in each other, he gradually engaged in more of these activities. Based on mutual trust and shared understanding, Principal Choi attempted to be a “servant leader.” By denying his positional power and by being friendly with the teachers, Principal Lee had been respected and trusted by the new guard. Mr. Han often portrayed the principal as a “principal from another planet” in that he was so different from other principals who tend to act as if they are little emperors in their small kingdoms. The new guard explained that they could reinforce democratic values and public good sentiments by redefining the principal as someone who has the formal and impartial authority to represent SCE. By reestablishing the stable and impartial power basis through rehabilitating principalship, they could circumvent personal and arbitrary appropriation of power at SCE and reinvigorate democratic decision making (Olsen, 2008). Moreover, by building an alliance with the principal who shared common beliefs and goals, the new guard was able to gain direct control over administrative processes and resources and fulfill their goals of focusing more on pedagogical development without much impediment (Sachs, 2002; Tilcsik, 2010). Simultaneously, the new guard tried to distribute tasks and responsibilities.

---

40 http://blog.naver.com/idoors
so that some members would not do all the work and monopolize power (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005). Metaphorically, they sought to create a “many-headed hydra” that would be difficult to kill and forget, thus helping address the challenge of leadership succession and sustainability of the organization (Morrill, 2006).

Overall, the new guard’s strategy was consistent with Harris et al.’s (2007) claim of the necessity of formal leadership alongside distributed leadership. Harris et al. (2007), argue that,

“… although distributed leadership initiatives are meant to flatten hierarchies and empower teachers by having them engage in high impact and enriched work, by virtue of their positional and symbolic authority principals still matter a great deal to these reforms. The paradox is that without stable, consistent leadership in schools distributed leadership will be incredibly vulnerable, as we have seen in chapter 6, and ultimately fragile. Furthermore, distributing leadership is not a way of reducing the workload of the head teacher. In short, distributing leadership to teachers does not result in fewer demands on those formal leadership positions. (Harris et al., 2007: 322)”

However, establishing the formal basis of principal leadership was challenging for SCE, as it had depended on the prevailing logic of participatory democracy. Despite Principal Choi’s representation of himself as a servant, many parents viewed him with suspicion. They tended to equate principals as agents of bureaucracy and assumed that the restoration of the principal’s power would trigger the resurgence of bureaucracy at SCE. This attitude was akin to Michels’ (2001[1912]) famous iron law of oligarchy:

“The iron law predicts that the appointment of professional leaders fosters goal displacement. As leaders become invested in retaining their own power and organizational building, they direct efforts away from goals that reflected members’ interests (Michels, 2001[1912]; quote from Voss & Sherman, 2000: 10).”
Similarly, Mr. Rhyu, who was still influential at SCE, raised concerns about the close relationship between the new guard and Principal Choi.

“I’m concerned about the recent developments at SCE. Mr. Yoon and Mr. Han are too close to principal Choi. If they cannot maintain distance from the principal, they run into the danger of becoming yes-men. They won’t be able to say “no” to him. It will be a serious problem later on. I always tried to keep a certain distance from Principal Lee. It allowed me to have some space to delimit his power.”

In responding to these suspicions and fears raised by some parents about the seemingly regaining power of Principal Choi, Mr. Yoon argued that,

“The most important thing to remember is that everything depends on who the person is. Even bureaucracy is still operated by people. Thus, bureaucracy also can take very different forms depending on who occupies the principal position.”

His emphasis on people within bureaucracies resonates with Gouldner’s rejection of the fixed image of bureaucracy as an iron-cage, an image that the old guard and their follower parents accepted without exception. Gouldner (1954) argues,

“The social scene described has sometimes been so completely stripped of people that the impression is unintentionally rendered that there are disembodied forces afoot, able to realize their ambitions apart from human action. This has colored some analyses of bureaucracy with funereal overtones, lending dramatic persuasiveness to the pessimistic portrayal of administrative systems” (p.16; quoted from Hallett, 2006: 220).

41 This invokes the fable of “the Scorpion and the Frog.” The story is about a scorpion asking a frog to carry him across a river. The frog is afraid of being stung, but the scorpion reassures him that if it stung the frog, the frog would sink and the scorpion would drown as well. The frog then agrees; nevertheless, in mid-river, the scorpion stings him, dooming the two of them. When asked why, the scorpion explains, "I'm a scorpion; it's my nature." This fable illustrates the insuppressible nature of one’s self at its base level and the concomitant result that may affect any innately antagonistic relationship. Similarly, Mr. Rhyu seemed to view the relationship between teachers and principals as structurally determined.
Recently, renewed interest in leadership in democratic organizations challenges the inevitability of oligarchical tendencies in leadership and instead seeks to understand the contingent relationship between the nature of leadership and the maturity of the organization. The findings demonstrate that the possibility of formalized leadership that enhances participation while alleviating the negative effects of structurelessness and arbitrariness within the context of school change. Furthermore, some scholars assert the notion of hybridity or hybrid leadership that problematize binaries such as participative/autocratic, concentrated/ dispersed, or hierarchy/heterarchy and capture the paradoxical aspects of leadership (Gronn, 2008; Collinson & Collinson, 2009). These developments in the leadership literature are similar to the evolution of leadership that embraces formal leadership while still boosting participation and empowerment at SCE. The reinstatement of the principal’s leadership pointed to the transition from familial and parental form of authority to professionalized authority based on rational routines, procedures, and rules (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1998; Rojas, 2010). Whether the evolving leadership configuration of SCE that blends positional authority and democratic control will support sustainable innovation without diluting SCE’s original goals remains to be seen.

**Building collaborative relationship with neighboring schools**

In the summer in 2009, the new guard applied to the Government grant initiative for “Rural School Renewal (전원학교 (Cheon-Won-Hak-Gyo))” in collaboration with three neighboring rural schools. By attempting to forge a school network with the neighboring rural schools, so called an “Edu-Belt (에듀벨트),” these four schools
planned to improve less-favored schools and aimed to advance the interest of social justice. In persuading the principals of these schools to work together to pursue a common mission, Principal Choi exercised remarkable inspirational leadership (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In the fall in 2009, when this plan was approved by the Korean Ministry of Educational and Human Resources, SCE was given a total of one million dollars for the three year implementation period.

With this initiative, the new guard and the principal emphasized the importance of building collaborative relationships with the “neighboring” schools and school district. The old guard started networking and partnership with schools at a distance where like-minded educators and parents pursued SIC, and then the new guard attempted to forge a network near home by capitalizing on the foundation that the old guard had already established. In order to convince the skeptical members about network building, the new guard argued that although the old guard had made efforts to establish the Small School Network connecting many rural schools in other regions to spread innovation, SCE now needed to work together with neighboring schools. Otherwise, they argued, SCE might be criticized as a self-indulgent school and its change would be delegitimized, being prey to jealousy from other schools in the district that would undermine its chances of sustaining long-term success (Hargreaves & Bascia, 2000). Mr. Yoon noted that:

“It is now impossible for SCE to remain an isolated island. If it does, SCE will be criticized by other educators and parents as selfish and narrow-minded. The mission of SCE is to improve the public good and advance the quality of education for all schools. Our efforts to build collaborative relationships with three neighboring schools are one way to prepare the ground for this vision.”
This effort of working together with neighboring schools helped SCE ease tensions with the sponsoring school district. Thus, it allowed SCE to create a more positive image of its change as legitimate and overcome SCE’s previous negative image as a “den” for activist teachers (Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Chen & O’Mahony, 2009). In turn, the heightened legitimacy provided more favorable conditions for spreading SCE’s innovation more widely (Armstrong, 2002; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). More pragmatically, they knew that they were now able to renovate the old school buildings and equip the school with cutting edge educational technologies and learning materials, thus further enhancing organizational maintenance and sustainability.

However, this approach was in stark contrast to the old guard’s strategies. While the old guard also maintained cooperative relations with other schools and the school district to secure resources and funding, it did so only minimally and defensively. The underlying reasons for this strategy were that any concessions would jeopardize SCE’s hard-earned autonomy and force SCE to abandon their goals and cherished practices for more conventional bureaucratic practices, thus triggering “mission drift” (Chen, 2009: 156; See also, Huerta, 2002; Coy & Hedeen, 2005; Coy et al., 2005; Levy & Scully, 2007). Some parent members worried about this initiative as well. They were concerned that this government initiative would trigger the bureaucratization of SCE and eventually make SCE more like conventional schools. When the new guard pursued this initiative they did not take the time to consult with parents due to the limited application period. This procedural mistake added fuel to the dormant conflict behind a series of the recent developments introduced by the new guard. Parents registered the following objections:
“We had done well without the luxuries of modern school buildings and cutting edge educational technologies. We don’t need fancy laptops for all the children and electric blackboards in every classroom. I think these things are at odds with SCE’s original vision. Those things only destroy SCE’s spirit of freedom, love of nature, and children’s creativity.” (Chae-Hyun’s dad)

“Who on earth decided this? Who wanted this? Parents don’t want it. The teachers and principal do! Parents had no ideas what was happening about this until the teachers announced that our school was selected for rural renewal. It really bothered parents that we were sidestepped by the teachers. I think there is a chasm between teachers and parents, and it is getting wider.” (Yun-Hee’s mom)

“It’s time for SCE’s parents to courageously stand up and end the teachers’ maneuver to erode SCE’s innovation and become a dummy of the school district! We should guard SCE against any attempt to accommodate and appropriate SCE by government entities.” (Mi-Na’s dad)

As these interview excerpts demonstrate, these parents were concerned that the more dependent SCE was on the government for needed resources, the more likely it was to comply with institutional norms. They were worried that SCE would yield to institutional pressures by receiving resources and funding. These concerns had obvious affinities with the social movement literature that shows how government support co-opts social movements and turns them into the hierarchical entities that they have vehemently avoided and how isomorphic pressures can lead alternative organizations to mimic the institutional forms that they see around them (Rothschild & Whitt, 1986; Simons & Ingram, 1997; Chen & Mahoney, 2009; Huerta, 2009). Parents argued that the new guard’s efforts to enhance SCE’s sustainability by adopting the government initiative would only increase the risk of “the regression to the mean” (Fink, 1999; 2001; Hargreaves & Giles, 2006; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). They claimed that it was similar to “riding the tiger” or “jumping on the wrong wagon” with the vain hope that the
alliance with the government would expedite their goals and secure their survival (Armstrong, 2002). On the contrary, they argued, this initiative would only cause SCE to become prey to the government, perpetuating the primacy of bureaucracy and its oppressive practices (Selznick, 1949; Coy & Hedeen, 2005).

SCE appeared to be falling apart. As the new guard and founding parents held competing ideas of how things should be done, they experienced growing pains in working together to implement a participatory decision making process for school decision-making. Mr. Woo explained:

“No, do you know that SCE is experiencing a crisis?42? Parents are agitated. Mr. Yoon and Mr. Han do not understand the importance of informal relationships at SCE. They are fixated on developing curriculum. Overlooking the importance of relationships between teachers and parents is like “throwing a baby out with the bath water.” As a matter of fact, they are tone-deaf in social relationships. They are not, politically savvy teachers like the Mr. Rhyu and Mr. Kang. They always take things at face value. They are authentic, but the flip side is that they are gullible. I think there should be some kind of a “third” way between the old guard and the new guard that might work better for SCE’s development.”

In reaction to these criticisms, the new guard emphasized the moral imperative of the Edu-belt initiative on the ground that it would promote genuine bottom-up collaboration with neighboring schools and reach educators beyond the single organizational change approach (Fullan, 2003; 2007; 2010). Mr. Han explained:

“Some members always oppose for the opposition’s sake before trying to do anything new. They always want to keep SCE as it is or even go back some imagined past, believing that the past was best and any change would only to make SCE deteriorate. The rural school initiative would help us move beyond our selfish and narrow adherence to our school

42 As this excerpt shows, the members adhering to the old guard’s logic tended to exaggerate the perception of a crisis in order to rationalize the desirability of the status quo.
towards schools around us. We can improve our school and provide our children with more enriched learning opportunities by working together with other educators in these schools.”

With regard to the some members’ skepticism about receiving resources from the school district, Mr. Han explained in at a parent-teacher meeting:

“We just want to make our school space more livable. Since SCE had been poorly maintained by the school district for many years, the school facilities are awful. There is no reason for us to endure the terrible facilities just because we are attempting to be an innovative school! If we attempt to implement an innovation that could be more significant and consequential in the long run, we need to think about our innovation within a long-term perspective. Trying to squeeze our limited energies and poor resources may not be the best answer.”

Parents’ concerns were gradually diminished and even the resistant parents were satisfied with the renovated facilities and the new educational materials. The new guard also sought to alleviate parents’ resistance by portraying the rural renewal initiative and the renovation project as “neutral” and “technical” in addition to emphasizing its moral purpose (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009). By emphasizing the “technical” aspects, the new guard diminished the possibility of resistance for ideological reasons.

The more favorable receptivity to this rural renewal initiative was also partly driven by demographic change. Many founding parent members who were the most vocal members left SCE as their children graduated. The departure of the founding parents and the old guard provided the new guard with more favorable conditions to realize their vision of how their organization should be run. This finding is akin to Hargreaves and Goodson’s (2006) finding that demographic change substantially influences the direction and sustainability of innovative schools over time. Furthermore, a convergence of common interest between the old guard and new guard emerged. Since the old guard
altered their change strategies towards “bottom-up change through top-down policies” and broader change within institutional spheres, they endorsed the new guard’s endeavor to move beyond the single organizational change at SCE and to build partnerships with other schools to spread change. The old guard thought the new network initiative would legitimize SCE’s change. In turn, the new guard gained support and resources to fulfill their goals as the old guard occupied the positions of power in the school district. It was consistent with the research findings suggesting that schools are more likely to sustain and deepen reform over time when school and district policy and priorities are aligned with reform (Coburn, 2004).

Whether SCE’s adoption of the government grant and the more collaborative move towards the district facilitated SCE’s innovative practices and organizational maintenance is not yet clear. As Hoffman (2001) suggests, “organizational action is not a strict reaction; conversely, organizational action is not defined autonomously without the influence of external bounds” (Hoffman, 2001; 197). Institutional and organizational dynamics are tightly intertwined. Yet, most studies have focused on macro-level influence at the organizational level without examining how organizing logics are developed or applied by actors within organizations (Friedland and Alford 1991; Rao et al. 2003; Chen, 2009; Chen & O’Mahony; Huerta, 2002, 2009a, 2009b). Conversely, most studies have focused only on a single organizational change without paying attention to the ecological effects of the change among other organizations. More detailed analyses of micro-level action and ecological dynamics of an organizational change would help explain how organizational actors adopt co-existing logics and practices and
how an innovative organization interacts with other neighboring organizations to improve their own and others’ organizations (Rojas, 2007; O’Mahony & Beckhy, 2008; Chen, 2009; Chen & O’Mahony, in press, 2009).

_Harnessing instructional development_

As I mentioned earlier, the new guard held a different view of change than the old guard, even though they had been chosen by the old guard for sharing similar goals and missions. Unlike the old guard, the new guard was more interested in instructional and curricular development. As the new guard accumulated influence, experience, and capacities, they attempted to redress the issue of insufficient instructional innovation head on. The new guard argued that it was futile to sustain SCE’s innovation through parent participation and teacher empowerment when there was no substantial instructional innovation and tangible curriculum development. Furthermore, they argued that as SCE’s innovation became more widely known as a model school change, the disparity between SCE’s image and suboptimal instructional practices only made SCE more vulnerable to external scrutiny and potential criticism (Hernes, 2003). They also pointed out that it was necessary to adapt the original curriculum to the new school environment whereby the student enrollment had almost doubled in recent years. As a result, in 2010, Mr. Yoon developed a new SCE’s instructional and curriculum guide booklets for teachers and parents. He also developed student’s workbooks for each subjects.

However, the new guard’s emphasis on developing a new curriculum and clear guidelines for SCE’s activities also created tensions and conflicts between the new guard and long-standing parents. Although these parents acknowledged and welcomed the new
initiatives, they were concerned that the new guard’s focus on curriculum development and classroom instruction would cancel out many of SCE’s innovative promises and inadvertently bring unwanted bureaucratization and standardization back to SCE:

“I don’t know why Mr. Yoon brought forward the new curriculum issue all of a sudden. SCE has been doing fine with the current curriculum over the past eight years.” (Hyun-Soo’s dad, parent and the president of the SCE School council)

“It seems to me that Mr. Yoon and Mr. Han viewed curriculum development as a wizard’s magic stone. They seem to think that as long as SCE had a decent and tangible curriculum, all of SCE’s problems would be resolved overnight. I don’t agree with their impetus for curriculum development. In the process they would limit teachers’ and students’ abilities to creatively teach and learn.” (Mr. Choo, teacher)

“When I was listening to Mr. Yoon’s accounts on the new curriculum initiative, I tried to come up with a proper image that might visualize the role of more standardized curriculum and guideline in the SCE community. Figuratively speaking, the new curriculum looks like regulations for a family of five to me. What does a family of five need that for? I am worried that the new curriculum and instruction drive will erode our carefully developed participatory decision-making and SCE’s free spirit.” (Myung-Hoon’s mom)

These skeptical parents and teachers tended to see the new guard’s move of curriculum development as a “Trojan horse” which would weaken their participation and autonomy and bring traditional professionalism that emphasizes teachers’ expertise back to SCE (Henig & Stone, 2008). Meanwhile, the supporting parents welcomed this new development and disputed the skeptical parents’ cynicism.

“It might be true that the space for parent participation might decline a little bit than before. But I do trust the new guard because they are really sincere persons and I know that they take their jobs really seriously. Particularly, I support Mr. Yoon’s new direction that emphasizes solidifying curriculum and instruction more than parent participation. As a matter of fact, I don’t think that we came to SCE to “communicate” more with teachers, although that is important. How could I expect to
communicate with the teachers to such an extent that I could have candid talks with them when I am not be able to do that with my wife at home? (Chae-Rin’s dad)

The new guard was encouraged by the supporting parents, but they were somewhat puzzled at the unexpected reaction of these parents because they had anticipated that parents would welcome their initiative to focus on instructional innovation. Although the parents delayed the new guard for a short while, this spurred the new guard to reevaluate whether they single-mindedly emphasized curriculum and instructional development while diminishing the values of parent participation and democratic decision makings (Wright & Fung, 2003; Kim et al., 2007). That is, these ongoing debates about how to balance the pursuit of technical instructional development and preserve participatory democratic practices helped resist the temptation to inadvertently redeploy formalized routines and standardization of instruction without being mindful of what these would actually lead to (Pierson, 2004; Dorado, 2005; McDonald & Shirley, 2009; Sauder & Espeland, 2008). Furthermore, thanks to the ongoing debates and conflicts, the new guard gained the opportunity of “going to the balcony” (Heifetz, 1994). It gradually became more appreciative of the fact that it was the old guard’s laborious efforts that had made the SCE’s innovation possible, and that they now could pay more attention to the instructional issues due to the organizational platform the old guard had built. They recognized that they could further improve SCE and insure SCE’s innovation more effectively when they capitalized on the foundation the old guard laid out, rather than striving to dismantle it (Abrahamson, 2004; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2009; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). In other words,
it dawned on them that their strategy of improving SCE by forsaking the old guard’s practices would be similar to, as Joshua Gamson (1993) pointed out, “an odd endeavor, much like pulling the rug out from under one’s own feet, not knowing how and where one will land (p. 594; See also Armstrong, 2002).” With regard to this, Mr. Yoon posted a reflective article on SCE’s website:

“Either blind adherence to utopian community participatory democracy or the obsessive pursuit of instructional improvement would not bring sustainable change to SCE. As people can’t see the wood for the trees, I recognized that being preoccupied by the desire to resolve the gap between the ideal and the substantive enactment in terms of teaching by developing a new curriculum and change guide, I could have left the door of SCE wide open to the bureaucracy that might have invited bigger contradictions. It is important for the change-minded teacher to be mindful of the importance of striking a balance between democratic governance and tangible instructional progress\(^{43}\).”

**Institutionalization of change: evading the iron cage and avoiding the disabling chaos**

The phenomenon of bureaucratization and formalization of social movements is not new. However, what separates SCE’s evolution from these organizations is that ongoing struggle about the consequences of bureaucratization promoted reflection that led to adjustments to the process rather than passive institutionalization. Thus, the exploration that even social movements and alternative organizations inevitably succumb to the formalization and institutionalization and that this process is solely determined by external enforcement and isomorphic pressures overlooks the active and dynamic internal process of institutionalization (DiMaggio, 1988; Huerta, 2002, 2009a, 2009b; Coburn, \(^{43}\)

\[\text{http://namhansan.es.kr/?act=board.read&mcode=1210&page=2&id=70&num=70}\]
Contrary to these assumptions, “institutionalization is a product of the political efforts of actors to accomplish their ends (DiMaggio, 1988:13).” It is a dynamic and political process in which the logic of bureaucratization or isomorphic pressures to conform are actively continuously mediated and negotiated by actors in the organizations (Zilber, 2002; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Binder, 2007; Sauder & Espeland, 2008; Hallett, 2009; Chen, 2009; Chen & O’Mahony, 2009). By going beyond the accounts of conventional institutionalization, this account affords a more realistic and comprehensive view of institutional processes in which the members’ coordinated and divergent actions were accompanied by sporadic and unpredictable coupling and decoupling (Denis et al., 2001; Pierson, 2004; Dorado, 2005; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009; Leach, 2009).

Concerning SCE’s development over time as the members became more experienced with participatory democracy and had a more mature understanding of it, they came to adopt participatory and communal forms of practices more genuinely while embracing the enabling functions of organizational routines and formalized bureaucratic procedures (Chen, 2009). While the new guard reinforced their professional expertise and redeployed formal decision making procedures in certain matters, they still urged parents to take action, particularly in initiating and carrying out school community activities and volunteering for school events. They argued that coordinating parent participation enabled further participation. In so doing, the school could attain a balance between
enhancing participatory democracy and enabling substantive innovation in terms of instruction as well as governance rather than privileging one at the expense of another.

The emergence of a more sustainable organizational form blending participatory democratic approaches and a professional logic emerged from the collective sense making and problem solving activities of the members. It is consistent with the notion that institutions can be created and sustained by “spatially dispersed, heterogeneous activity by actors with various kinds and levels of resources (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007: 993).” This overcomes the reductionists’ fallacy of actor-centered functionalism that assumes “actors did everything; actors messed everything (Pierson, 2004; See also, Thelen, 2004),” as well as the fallacy of structural determinism.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION: RECONCEPTUALIZING SELF-INITIATED CHANGE

Three initial research questions guided my research:

- What mechanisms do the change agents of SIC employ, how do they implement these mechanisms and why do they employ them?
- What are the characteristics of the processes of SIC? What are the pacing and the sequencing of the change?
- How does SIC unfold over time, and why?

In answering these three initial questions a fourth research question emerged that summates the other three and that would lead on to my conclusion:

- What implications do an investigation of self-initiated change in one school for understanding existing theories of self-initiated and imposed educational change?

This section is divided into three parts. I first present the change mechanisms that generate SIC. The mechanisms involve conversion, layering, and recombination that embody the ideal of “change without pain” by balancing change and stability (Abrahamson, 2004). Then, I depict the slow moving process of change. This process is associated with two paradoxes: the two-fold task of implementing change while running it; and internal and external contradictions. Lastly, I highlight the dialectical and cyclical development of change dimensions and the skillful way of juxtaposing them. Based on these analyses, I propose ways of conceptualizing SIC as: “change without pain”; “slow-moving change”; “dialectical/cyclical change.” Then, in the following conclusion
chapter, I will discuss the broader implications of this study on educational change, which is linked to my fourth research question.

**Change mechanisms: change without pain**

The generative mechanisms for addressing questions of how SIC emerges, sustains, develops, and evolves over time are institutional conversion, institutional layering, and recombination. As I have illuminated, the old guard tried to construct an alternative method of change by exploiting the gap between rules and effects and searching out vulnerabilities of existing institutional arrangements without significantly changing the formal structure of public schools. For example, when there was a school closing crisis, the old guard seized the opportunity. By turning to the strategy of institutional conversion, they successfully transformed the closing school into an innovative school. And when the political and institutional resistance declined in response to favorable political winds, like the emergence of the politically progressive superintendent in the region, they successfully layered their school innovation strategies on top of the existing systems.

The detailed analysis of SCE’s change tells us how SIC at the margin can lead to structural and systematic change in a very incremental and gradual way (Palier, 2005; Thelen & Streeck, 2005). As the findings suggest, layering has proved particularly important in amplifying local organization change into system-level consequential change in an organizational field. This development is quite different from large-scale and abrupt change which is the case of excessive pain and repetitive fatigue (Abrahamson, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004).
During the process of change, “considerable continuities on the surface masked important underlying changes resulting from the way in which conventional rules and procedures of bureaucratic schooling are reinterpreted and converted to new forms” (Thelen & Streeck, 2005: 29). Since the old guard cultivated change from within the context of existing opportunities and constraints – working around arrangements they could not change while attempting to harness others in new ways, the change avoided generating too much pain, proceeding incrementally and without much resistance and interruption from institutional incumbents (Thelen & Streeck, 2005). This means that, contrary to the conventional theory of change that asserts that only exogenous and abrupt change only generates fundamental, systemic change, change can be created through endogenous sources in an incremental way within the existing system. However, this does not mean that SIC denies exogenous factors for change. Rather, the findings of this study suggest that when endogenous and exogenous forces for change combine, a consequential change is more likely (Deeg, 2005)

Moreover, recombination is integral to the mechanisms of SIC. Recombination can involve the redeployment of the old rules or even practices that have been abandoned (Schneiberg, 2007; Thelen & Streeck, 2010). While the old guard as activists was more likely to utilize the recombination mechanisms to exploit or appropriate the existing system, the new guard used recombination as a tool to synthesize existing elements in a more complementary way. The new guard pursued building a sustainable hybrid form of participatory change and principled professionalism (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). For example, it “creatively” recombined participatory democracy with the formalized rules
and procedures. Engaging in a national teacher network of Korean language teachers as a successful leader provided the new guard with a broader view of educational change and helped them transcend the rigid view that activism and bureaucracy are mutually exclusive. In addition, the internal contradictions of masked hegemony, tyrannical pressure for group conformity, and firefighting that spurred them to redeploy the formalized measures as pragmatic solutions to entangled problems. The new guard argued that the redeployment of formal procedures and practices was necessary to move beyond the initial stage of organizational change. They argued that in order to secure sustainable change and that enthusiasm and a compelling mission themselves were not enough to sustain an organization over an extended period of time, they needed to institutionalize routines, curriculum, and decision-making procedures (Fullan, 2007; Cuban et al., 2010). They particularly emphasized the importance of institutionalizing and distributing leadership after going through a painful leadership succession crisis and the sudden departure of their charismatic leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

The reintroduction of bureaucratic mechanisms into SCE’s participatory change process seemed to be an apparent reversal that could be viewed as a regression to the conventional school. This view is misleading because formalized rules and procedures were used to promote instructional development and preserve participatory democracy. Not all formalized organizations are “bureaucratic” (See also, Voss & Sherman, 2000; Chen, 2009) and as Clemens and Minkoff (2004) argue, formal organizations may be associated with radical actions (Rucht, 1999) or even the reinvigoration of organizations
that had succumbed to quiescent oligarchy (Voss & Sherman, 2000). Likewise, as Polletta (2002) suggests,

“‘No one believes any longer that decisions can be made by strict consensus. Activists are more comfortable with rules, less hostile to power, and more attuned to inequalities concealed in informal relations’” (p. 202).

Recombination mechanisms can be most successful and powerful when they make a sustainable hybrid out of seemingly mutually exclusive elements or logics (Abrahamson, 2004; Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Campbell, 2005). Hargrave and Van de Ven (2009) suggest that,

“The change agents, whether incumbents or challengers, will be most effective when they take both/and rather than either/or orientation to managing contradictions. The simultaneous embrace of contradictory poles can stimulate creativity and innovation. In contrast, practices that address one pole of contradiction but not the other might inadvertently work against themselves by releasing pressure to satisfy the contradictory pole” (p. 129)

Contrary to the LSR model that looks outwards and invokes exogenous shocks which profoundly subvert existing routines, established way of thinking and experience, SIC looks inwards and backwards at “what change agents can do on or with existing institutional arrangements and at how the histories of path creation themselves generate resources for transformation or the creation of new forms” (Schneiberg, 2007: 51; see also, Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In a similar vein, given the nature of incremental and endogenous small-scale change, SCE’s change can also be conceptualized as a “positive deviance” (Cameron, 2009; Hargreaves, 2007) or “micro-mobilization” (Scully & Segal, 2002) whereby the change agents drew on the pre-given arrangements and practices around them and engaged in creative recombination rather than wholesale destruction
Based on the findings of this study, I propose that SIC can be conceptualized as change without pain (Abrahamson, 2004) or at least with less pain than is common in large-scale reform. This does not mean that I subscribe to the static and romanticized notion that SIC is free of pain and conflict. This view overlooks important dilemmas that may be embedded in self-initiated change and makes it difficult for us to respond to them effectively (Abrahamson, 2004; Armstrong, 2002). Resilient change agents can stand some pain in challenging circumstances by making it meaningful through a strong sense of purpose and supportive partnership (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). For example, Mr. Rhyu noted that,

“The suffering and adversity of making and sustaining SCE’s change are nothing compared the ones I had to endure at bureaucratic and authoritarian schools in which I could not breathe well. SCE is a sort of hope and redemption to me who had been suffocated by the oppressive and inhumane system. I would be willing to and am ready to accept any further hardship or pain that might be involved in any change like SCE’s.”

In sum, SIC, or change with minimal, necessary pain, requires balancing stability with change in order to exploit the benefits of both and avoid the unnecessary disruption that might be caused by either in isolation (Thelen & Streeck, 2005). However, change mechanisms are insufficient to initiate and sustain SIC. We also need to take the change processes seriously. In the following section, I will examine SIC change processes.

**Change processes: slow moving change**

There has been an assumption in much of the recent literature of educational change that fundamental change depends upon relatively rapid and large-scale change
across entire system ((Barber, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Fullan, 2000, 2009; Honig, 2004; Hopkins, 2007)). However, the change that I studied illustrates a school change characterized by a relatively slow and sometimes unintended process toward systemic improvement. There is very little understanding about how this type of change occurs in the educational change literature and in institutional change studies. For example, according to the punctuated equilibrium theory in which change occurs in rapid bursts, followed by long periods of stasis within institutional literature, small changes do not accumulate into big ones, yet that is what I observed at SCE. The amplifying actions and their dynamic interplay with contextual conditions escalated the accumulation of small changes into a pattern that ultimately became radical and large-scale. How did this change happen? Without closely examining the dynamic nature of the SIC change process, the change process remains mysterious. This suggests that we need to pay more attention to pacing of change over time (Ancona et al., 2001; Fullan, 2009; Huy, 2001; Pierson, 2004). The analysis of temporal processes is crucial with change that evolves over long periods of time. This section illustrates the distinct nature of the process of slow moving change.

First, as mentioned earlier, the multiple dimensions of change (i.e. technological, political, and cultural) are often incompatible with each other (Orren & Skowronek, 1994; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010; Weick, 1976). One way to resolve the tensions among them is through pacing (Blau, 1964; Denis et al., 1996, 2001). Rather than achieving change with less pain by utilizing recombination to reduce disruption, pacing aims to achieve change by “alternating, over time, periods of greater stability with periods of greater
change in order to use the benefits of each to counterbalance the pain brought on by the other” (Abrahamson, 2004: 165). The pacing approach resonates well with incremental changes (Abrahamson, 2004; Reay et al., 2006). This approach enables change agents to manage of the risks of attempting disruptive change and to solidify early gains (Reay et al., 2006).

Second, careful consideration of sequence and temporal pacing is especially crucial to understanding the change process characterized by “the sizable time lag between actions and the long-term consequences of those actions and the unintended consequences in settings of great complexity and high uncertainty (Pierson, 2004: 14).” The time lag between actions and both intended and unintended consequence is ubiquitous in any attempt at change (Fullan, 2001; Pierson, 2004). These lagging elements were present in an acute form within SIC or its bottom-up change processes because of the inherent ambiguities and uncertainties in power structure, goals, and strategies involved (Denis et al., 1996).

Moreover, in many cases, change agents of SIC found themselves “building a plane while flying it” (Honig, 2002, 2009; See also Muncey & McQuillan, 1996). Since the change took place accidentally, participants had competing interests which could not be resolved at the initiation stage (Fullan, 2001). The problem of lack of clarity carried over into the implementation phase where the seeds of conflicts hiding beneath the surface became more visible (Fullan, 2001). The implementation process became even more complicated because the founding members wanted to achieve SIC characterized by enhanced participation of teachers and parents along with democratic decision making, as
an alternative to hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of schooling. While this approach can provide schools with discretion over their work and create conditions important for strengthening teaching and learning (Honig, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2009), it is difficult to implement and sustain once it is set in motion (Honig, 2002, 2003; Stone, 2001).

From the outset, SCE confronted many challenges in implementing its change. Internally, it was difficult to coordinate the divergent interests and contradictory values among people involved. Externally, because SCE’s change agents disrupted existing arrangements and suggested alternatives while also preserving positive elements of the existing arrangements, the relationship with the school district was complicated. Therefore, survival and sustainability were always the most immediate priorities. As a result, change agents had to carry out the dual task of simultaneously disrupting institutional arrangements (change) and maintaining the nascent organization (stability). They had to provide members with both a sense of urgency for change and a sense of security about their organization. Implementing change while maintaining stability is extremely difficult and may delay the change process substantially (Seo et al., 2004). Thus, in studying SIC, researchers need to pay particular attention to its temporal processes.

Third tension that needs to be addressed in the process of change is internal/external contradiction (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009). In the SIC process, actors must simultaneously develop and manage their organization’s internal capabilities, culture, and systems and also attend to the external environment. This issue may become particularly challenging when school change moves beyond the initial implementation due to that of
sustaining change over time (Coburn, 1004). According to Fink (2000), the change process may contain a paradox of sustainability and scaling up, of endurance and breadth, where they are inversely related. This tension grew increasingly acute at SCE when the more the change diverged from its origins, and the more comprehensive the goals of the change became (Coburn, 2004). However, in contrast to Fink’s claim, my findings of this study suggest that because SCE’s change was closely intertwined with the broader systems and district, it was better able to sustain change.

This study has documented a case of slow-moving but consequential educational change. According to Quack and Djelic (2005), the metaphor of “stalactite change” characterizes the process of change in which a succession of incremental steps is nevertheless consequential.

“The image is that of minuscule drops of water falling from the vault of a cave. In itself, it seems insignificant with no impact on the cave as a whole. However, under given conditions of temperature, the succession and combination of large numbers of droplets may lead to an aggregation of the calcite contained in those drops. After a long while, the result is a thick landscape of innovatively shaped stalactites and stalagmites and a consequential transformation, one could say, of the cave as a whole.” (p. 276)

This conceptualization of incremental SIC helps scholars overcome the sharp dichotomy between abrupt and radical change on the one hand, and incremental and piecemeal change on the other (Djelic & Quack, 2003; Reay et al., 2006; Scully & Segal, 2002), thereby providing a way to reconcile the tension between LSR and SIC.

**Change dimension: dialectical and cyclical change**

My research goal was to explore the change dimensions of SIC and trace the change in the three dimensions over time. House and McQuillan (1998) suggest that in
order to successfully implement educational change we should take an integrative approach that appreciates all three dimensions of change simultaneously. They argue that an inadequate or partial understanding of all these three dimensions results in superficial changes or even reform failure (House & McQuillan, 2005; See also, Fullan, 2001). However, in practice, an integrative enactment of the changes in these dimensions is more complicated than often assumed. This is because the three dimensions are unlikely to change in unison (Orren & Skowronek, 1994; Skowronek, 1995) and because changes in one dimension may lag behind changes in another (Campbell, 2004; Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Langley, 1999, in press; North, 1990; Pierson, 2004; Zbaracki, 1998). Thelen and Streeck (2005) explain that,

“Human actors seem to be quite capable to operate simultaneously in different institutional contexts governed by different logics, moving back and forth between them, or playing them off against one another. Also, human societies appear to have enough slack, and their causal texture usually seems to be loose enough (or cause takes enough time to turn into effect) to be tolerant of considerable friction between differently constructed institutions or action spaces. All societies, in other words, are in some way hybrids, some more and some less (p. 21).”

For example, it is commonly assumed that structural changes are easier to bring about than normative ones (Bartunek, 1984; Fullan, 2001). However, the temporal enactment of the change dimension may be more complicated. Sometimes, cultural or normative change can be easier to begin than structural change when a small group of like-minded people attempt to launch a change that fits their worldviews within the existing structural constraints (Armstrong, 2002; Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Hargreaves, 1994; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Raeburn, 2004; Rojas, 2007; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010. In
other words, in SCE, ‘reculturing’ was easier to begin and achieve than ‘restructuring’ (Hargreaves, 1994; See also, Kotter, 2008).

If institutions are made up of conflicting and contradictory dimensions or logics, such as those associated with ‘symbolic versus substantive’ elements (Orren & Skowronek, 1994; Thelen & Mahoney, 2010; Thelen & Streeck, 2005), then it is important to not only integrate the change dimensions but also to disaggregate them and track them over time (Campbell, 2004). Campbell (2004) argues that by tracking dimensions of change over time, we can determine what the pattern of change has been. If the change involves all three dimensions suddenly and simultaneously over a given period time, then it can be regarded as a revolutionary change. If it involves relatively few changes, or if one change occurs first, then another, over a long period of time, we regard it as a model of more evolutionary and incremental change. In other words, he claims that “the pattern of change can be differentiated according to how many dimensions change and how fast they do so (p. 40).” While LSRs tend to be multifaceted, simultaneous, and expeditious in order to reach new coherent configurations rapidly, SICs proceed incrementally and sequentially (Huy, 2001; Mintzberg & Huy, 2003).

Identifying the relevant dimensions over time in SIC is particularly difficult since it is a “lumpy and uneven process” (Campbell, 2004:39). The number and dynamics of factors that interact and affect the process of change are too overwhelming to plan in advance in a determined way (Fullan, 2001). For example, even if a SIC is inspired with a more radical innovation, it may still attempt to change only one dimension at a time if its agents “do not believe that they have the capacities to implement and sustain the
changes in multiple dimensions at the same time” (Campbell, 2004: 183). Thus, contrary to the wisdom emphasizing integrative approaches in implementing educational change (Bolman & Deal, 2003; House & McQuillan, 2005), sometimes it is too risky to integrate these three dimensions all at once (Aldrich, 1994; Bryk et al., 1998; Fullan, 1998, 2001). As Fullan (2001) argues, “attempting too much too quickly can result in massive failure” (p. 71). Thus, it can therefore be beneficial for SIC to selectively implement change in each dimension (technological, cultural, and political dimensions) in an appropriate sequence and pace and with mindful juxtaposition (Campbell, 2004; Huy, 2001; Pierson, 2004).

In order to address the multiple and contradictory dimensions of change a dialectical perspective is required. Although incremental change may suggest a smooth “stepwise” change from one dimension to another. At the sub-organizational level, there is a tendency for change to be characterized by oscillations and reversals (Scully & Segal, 2002), but the disparities and contradictions between espoused goals and actual enactments may in turn encourage people to reexamine their initial beliefs and values driving change. For example, when they were promoted by the old guard, SCE’s innovations were seen a politically and symbolically driven form of change. When they were promoted by the more professional-oriented new guard, greater formalization might paradoxically have supported a restoration of the original innovation (Denis et al., 1996; 2001; Haveman et al., 2007; Sonnenshein, 2010). SIC can be non-linear, iterative, interactive, cyclical and regressive (Campbell, 2004; Denis et al., 1996, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Kew, 2010; Zbaracki, 1998). It is also dialectical in the sense that new
arrangements are challenged by proponents of alternative arrangements (Farjoun, 2001, 2010; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009; Seo & Creed, 2001). Such dialectical processes can actually enhance rather than undermine sustainability. Fullan (2005) claims that “sustainability is cyclical for two fundamental reasons: one has to do with energy, and the other with periodic plateaus, where additional time and ingenuity are required for the next adaptive breakthrough” (p. 25). Cameron and Quinn (1988) argue that without dialectical tension between simultaneous oppositions, unproductive schismogenesis occurs. They refer to schismogenesis as “a process of self-reinforcement where one action or attribute perpetuates itself until it becomes extreme and therefore dysfunctional” (1988:6). All this is consistent with the notion that educational change can be created and sustained by distributed, heterogeneous activity by actors with various kinds of resources (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001), thus overcoming the reductionists’ fallacy of charismatic or transformative leadership that assumes “actors did everything; actors messed up everything” (Pierson, 2004).

SIC can therefore be conceptualized as a cyclical and dialectical change that can reorient change agents towards deeper appreciation of the initial goals (redeployment) or towards a new thesis (progressive change). With time, the synthesis becomes the thesis for a new cycle of dialectical change (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006, 2009). Thus, change processes are ‘unfinished’ work. In order to sustain change over time, even SIC, not to mention mandated LSCs, must therefore leave scope and flexibility for ongoing modification of, continuous learning and engagement with the change itself (Hargreaves, 2004).
Chapter 8
Conclusion

This chapter delves into the implications of this study to theory of educational change, practical implications, and suggestions for future studies.

Implications for a theory of educational change

In addition to understanding the mechanisms, processes and dimensions of SIC, this study in particular has broader implications for educational change as a whole, which focus on the fourth research question: “What implications does an investigation of self-initiated change in one school have for understanding existing theories of self-initiated and imposed educational change?”

This study has focused on the nature of SIC that is incremental but consequential. It has examined the mechanisms, processes and dimensions of change. It has also offered a new exploratory conceptualization of SIC. The existing theory of educational change does not adequately explain what I observed at SCE. While the model of LSR suggests that self-initiated change do not accumulate into consequential ones, this study has shown that abrupt and exogenous LSR is not necessary for radical widespread change to happen.

Indeed, as Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) claim

“some of the most effective educational change efforts do not begin with governments, although governments can create the conditions in which they flourish, These reform movements work around governments, beside it, and sometimes even against it” (p. 50).

Similarly, as Hargreaves (2000) suggests,

“Educational change must connect teachers to the system and society in an activist way, where they can see themselves not just as effects of the context, but as part of the context, and as agents who can and must influence how others perceive, shape, and support their work” (p. 244).
This is not to argue that we should abandon LSR or replace it with pure bottom-up, self-initiated change. Rather, we need to recognize that LSR and SIC are not mutually exclusive. There need be no sharp distinction between the two if SICs turn into deep and pervasive changes (“Self-initiated” LSR) over time; or if apparent LSRs stem from many SICs (Campbell, 2004; Huy, 200; Van de Ven & Garud, 1993). Hence, there need to be more creative and rhythmic recombinations of LSC and SIC along with well-articulated pacing and sequencing whereby systematic planning, data, and professional development programs can be used to create an environment more conducive to SIC that can be consequential over time (Abrahamson, 2004; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Hargreaves, 2007, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003).

Second, in the literature of educational change and sustainability, the fates of innovative schools are often pessimistic. They seem destined for short-term success followed by long-term decline. Innovative schools tend to follow the trajectories of predictable and inevitable decline due to factors such as changing leadership, the gradual loss of key teaching staff, changes in the size and composition of student demography, and shifts in policy or district priorities that amount to an “attrition of change” (Fink, 1999; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Goodson & Hargreaves, 2006; Sarason, 1990). In contrast to this tendency, the findings of this study show that SIC that is small, endogenous and incremental can sustain change and even become consequential at a system-level by becoming a learning organization, building multiple networks with other schools and educators, seizing favorable political opportunities and maintaining activism while institutionalizing change. Positive educational change can cause complacency
within the organization and jealousy among other neighboring schools, leading the organization to follow the sad destinies of many other innovative schools, but in this study’s case of SIC, the old guard stayed off the attrition of change by becoming painstakingly self-reflective. Even at the height of success, Mr. Rhyu was vigilant about self-indulgence and complacency. The new guard sought to resolve the internal contradictions of change and stability by institutionalizing change while maintaining participatory engagement.

**Implications for practice**

This study offers implications for educational change practice. First, in building partnerships with parents, educators need a new, more principled professionalism that means “more than showing greater individual empathy, intimate friendship toward and understanding of parents” (Hargreaves, 2000: 244). Creating a more principled, open and inclusive professionalism should be more about public projects enhancing moral purpose and social justice (Hargreaves, 2000). Given the profoundly political complexities involved in SIC, in order to prevent the damaging effects of micropolitics, teachers and administrators involved in school change efforts should engage in open and honest dialogue (Datnow, 2000). According to Datnow,

> “By bringing micropolitics out into the open, rather than allowing them to fester beneath the surface – only to later find that they can derail reform…. educators can work toward dismantling them and toward creating meaningful, long term school reform” (Datnow, 2000: 154).

Second, with regard to change mechanisms, in utilizing the recombination strategy, the change agents who are committed to a particular change or distinctive beliefs are easily susceptible to short-term opportunism that is “the pursuit of immediate,
short-run advantages in a way inadequately controlled by considerations of principle and ultimate consequence” (Selznick, 1957: 143), leading to loss of integrity and legitimacy (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Kraatz, 2009; Selznick, 1957). Thus, while it is important to exploit openings for change, the essence of the change leadership is about striking a balance between change and stability and between integrity and political skills so as to develop long-term capacities for change and sustainability (Fullan, 2005; Selznick, 1957).

Third, with regard to change dimensions, the dialectical and cyclical nature of change suggests that change agents might pay more attention to the fact that their practices can have contradictory outcomes which leaders either do not always understand or of which they are unaware. For example, as Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) point out, “Change puts some people in the limelight and others in the shadows. Some are keen to be on the leading edge of change; others find themselves on the sharp edge” (p. 3).

Collinson (2005) notes that apparently successful leadership practices inherently generate their own resistance. The management of contradictions is an important but undertheorized and underdeveloped area in the literature of change (Hargreaves, 1994; Fullan, 1999, 2001; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009). This study suggests that change agents cannot creatively manage contradictions unless they recognize that processes of change are dialectical, recursive, and cyclical (Denis et al., 1996; 2001; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009; Sonnenshein, 2010). This creative management can release creativity and lessen adverse unintended consequences (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009).

**Limitations and future studies**
While this study provides benefits for researchers and practitioners, it also possesses limitations. First, this research was conducted in a single organization. Thus, it was beyond the scope of this study to analyze how the mechanisms, processes and dimensions of change might vary in different settings. This study aimed to generate and extend theory, and further research is necessary to test the proposed models in other settings, including schools in urban settings and mid-sized schools.

Second, while this case study maps the relatively early evolution of continuous school change and change that is still unfolding, it is uncertain whether SCE will sustain its change and transform the school over longer periods of time. Future work can pick up where this case study ends, to explore the ongoing development of school change and its impact over time. Furthermore, we need more longitudinal and historically grounded studies that trace the evolution of educational change and analyze the sustainability of change over long periods (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

Finally, future work may also examine the diffusion of SCE’s change. This study identifies a distinctive pattern of scaling up of change. Consistent with Hargreaves & Shirley’s (2009) finding, the old guard started networking and partnership with schools at a distance where like-minded educators and parents pursued SIC, then the new guard attempted to forge a network nearer to home by capitalizing on the foundation the old guard had already established. This rise and trajectory of scaling up resonates with the theory of mimetic and normative isomorphism in the institutional literature. Mimetic isomorphism refers to a process of imitation or modeling whereby organizations mimic the policies, practices, and structure of other organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).
This source of change stems from the “tendency of administrators to emulate apparently successful forms” (Raeburn, 2004: 133). It seems that in the early stages mimetic isomorphism served as a source for diffusion of SCE’s change. In addition to mimetic pressures, institutional scholars identify normative isomorphism that derives from the pressures to “establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 70). This also seems to have played a key role in the diffusion of SCE’s change near home. More thorough study of this is beyond the scope of the current study. Future studies of diffusion of change need to address this issue in a more systematic way.
References


Institutional patterns and organizations: Culture and environment (pp. 3-21).
Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.


*Academy of Management Journal* 52(1), 11-36.


______ (2000a) Mixed emotions: teachers' perceptions of their interactions with students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(8), 811-826.


*Administrative Sciences Quarterly*, 225, 68-86.


*Comparative Education*, 38(3), 315-325.


---

44 I deliberately modified the title of the book and used fictitious author name to protect confidentiality.


and C. Milofsky (eds.), *Handbook of Community Movements and Local Organizations* (pp. 346-361). New York: Springer Science & Business Media LLC.


⁴⁵ The author’s name is a pseudonym and the title is a modified one.


Zhao, Y. (2009). *Catching up or leading the way.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
