WHEN REFORMS TRAVEL: THE SEQUEL

Hugh Mehan, Lea Hubbard, and Mary Kay Stein[*]

In a previous paper in this journal (Stein et al 2003), we described the process in which a reform, grown in the soil of one school district (Community District #2 in New York City) was transplanted to new soil, a new context (the San Diego City Schools) in 1998. In this paper we examine the condition of the reform 6 years later. We chose 2004 as the end point of this investigation because by that time Anthony Alvarado, the architect of the reform in New York City and its journey to San Diego, left the district and a new phase of reform was well underway.

The paper is arranged in 4 parts. In Part I, we present the theoretical perspective that guided our research, summarize the principles that guided this reform from 1998-2002, and describe our research methods. In Part 2, we analyze how the reform played out in San Diego from its inception in July 1998 to August 2002, including the cultural and political clashes that erupted within the district and between the district and valued constituencies. In Part 3 we describe the modifications installed by the district leadership that derived from cultural clashes and community politics. In Part 4, we examine the lessons that this district's leadership has learned in the face of cultural and political clashes and speculate on their future.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

The Technical, Cultural, and Political Dimensions of Reform

Oakes (1992) and her colleagues (Oakes et al., 1997; Oakes et al., 1999; Yonezawa et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2002) propose that it is productive to see school change as a multi-faceted process with technical, normative (what we will henceforth call cultural), and political dimensions. In the final analysis, reform efforts often activate actions on all dimensions, but often reformers lead with or emphasize actions on one dimension. Some reforms lead with one dimension and then move to others explicitly. More often, reformers initiate a one-dimensional reform, not realizing that actions taken in one part of a complex system such as a school district, inevitably have consequences (some unintended) in all other parts of the system (Sarason 1982).

When reformers attempt to improve schools by leading with technical means, they add resources such as labs, equipment, curriculum, and/or focus on supporting teachers' development of new knowledge and skills. When reformers attempt to change schools by leading with cultural means, they engage educators' values, beliefs, and norms, often about controversial topics such as the placement of teachers, the nature of intelligence and its distribution across race, ethnicity, class, and gender, as well as school sorting or testing practices. When reformers attempt to improve schools by leading with political means, they work to build productive professional relationships and galvanize important political constituencies.

The Theory of Action Guiding the SDCS Reform

In the educational context, a "theory of action" encompasses the beliefs and interconnected explanatory structures that underlie educational leaders' approach to instruction, curriculum, and the organization of schools—especially as these concerns attempt to guide reforms (Argyris & Schön, 1978; 1996; Bryk, et al., 1998). A theory of action states educational goals, articulates strategies for attaining those goals, and provides justifications or explanations for why those strategies should produce the designated goals.

As prominently displayed on all district documents: *The mission of the San Diego City Schools is to improve student achievement by supporting teaching and learning in the classroom.* To achieve that commendable goal, the District instantiated a content-driven, centralized, comprehensive, and fast-paced reform starting in 1998. The reform was *content-driven* in that the development of students' literacy skills was at the forefront. Improvements in student achievement were viewed as intimately linked to concerted efforts to improve instructional practice through sustained and focused professional development for teachers and leadership—from the principal to the superintendent—both of which were to be similarly focused on the teaching and learning of literacy. The reform was *centralized* in that major instructional, operational, and professional development decisions emanated from the district leadership while instructional leaders, content administrators at school sites, staff developers and resource teachers provided guidance and direction to teachers. The reform was *comprehensive* in that all schools in the district were expected to implement all dimensions of the reform. The reform was *fast-paced* in that its major elements were introduced from the first days that the new district leadership took office. Instead of a preparation period followed by a pilot phase followed by full implementation, the district leaders chose to have their educators "learn to fly the plane while flying it."

Cast in terms of our modification of Oakes 3-dimensional model of educational change, the SDCS reform was composed of an intriguing combination of technical, cultural, and political ingredients. The unrelenting focus on instruction and teacher professional development prior to considering any structural modifications (such as changing the master calendar, eliminating tracking systems, reducing school size) exemplifies the technical approach to change. By attempting to organize educators into *communities* of practice, moving teaching from private to public practice, and transforming operational managers into "instructional leaders," the SDCS leadership attempted to "reculture" the SDCS schools. This "reculturation" (Hargreaves, 1994) involved developing common thoughts, beliefs and a common language about skills, practices, and accountability among educators in every part of the school system in order to reach the district's oft-stated goal, which was to improve student achievement by supporting teaching and learning in the classroom. The reform's political dimension was evident in the leadership's decision to appeal to the business community, by making changes quickly, reducing administrative positions, and demanding accountability for educational actions.

The district's "not reckless but fearless" pace (Bersin, 2000, quoted in Cuban & Usdan 2003: 82), centralized, and comprehensive reform was legitimated on moral and political grounds. Comprehensive, simultaneous, and centralized implementation was legitimated morally by saying significant numbers of students cannot be asked to wait until an entire system is ready to provide them with the support they need in order to learn. Their theory of action was legitimated

politically by saying that piece-meal modifications are all too often absorbed by the system and therefore do not lead to paradigmatic shifts. The SDCS investments in instruction and professional development were legitimated by claiming these changes in professional practices rested on a well-established, empirically-supported disciplinary knowledge base.

Methods

This paper is part of a larger study of the reform in San Diego in which we have been studying the district's espoused theory of reform and its enactment at different layers of the system, from instructional leaders, to principals, to teachers interacting with students in classrooms (Hubbard et al., 2006). Our data gathering procedures for this paper involved analyzing official documents (school board reports, e-mails, letters, and newspaper articles), observing school board meetings (or videotapes of them), community, and parent group meetings in low-income and well-to-do neighborhoods. We participated in and observed meetings of the Business Roundtable of Education, California State Legislature, and gatherings of researchers assembled by the Hewlett and MacArthur Foundations. We interviewed Mark Knapp, President of the SDEA and union representatives at school sites, the leadership of the Latino Coalition, Superintendent Bersin and Chancellor the Executive Officer to the Chancellor, the Director of Literacy and Social Studies, two Professional Consultants, the Senior High Literacy Manger, the Biliteracy Coordinator, the Director of Science and Educational Technology, the Director of Mathematics and the Executive Director, Leadership Academy, University of San Diego). Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. Our research assistants also observed classroom lessons in 3 classrooms in each of 6 schools. Our purpose here, as in the larger study, is not to take sides; we intend to present the multiple perspectives so that readers can better understand the conflict swirling about this daring reform.

PART 2: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CLASHES

OVER THE DISTRICT'S THEORY OF ACTION

The SDCS was blessed with innovative leaders who had a tested theory of action. They invested significant human and material resources in a wide range of professional development activities embedded in instructional work at the school-site assisted by mentors who were close to the action. These resources were especially allocated to the lowest performing schools. Despite the presence of these positive enabling conditions, the centralized, comprehensive, fast-paced and instruction-based reform was modified and supplemented by another, more differentiated, slower paced, and structurally-based reform starting in 2003. In this section we explain why the district's theory did not translate into practice smoothly. We propose that a dynamic combination of cultural and political factors threatened the coherence initially cherished by the district leaders. We begin with an examination of the cultural clashes that threatened this uniquely comprehensive effort.

The relations within social organizations such as the central office of school districts and the entities they deal with such as the schools, parent groups, unions, the state, and federal government are sometimes messy, sometimes contentious, often conflicted, even chaotic (Powell

& DiMaggio, 1991; Binder, 2002). Social actors in pragmatic social organizations such as district offices and schools are constrained by the limitations on their capacity to process information by a variety of practical, cultural, and political circumstances. To adapt to the practicalities of messy organizational decision-making situations, these "practical actors" employ routines and standard operating procedures within an organizational culture that is infused with deep-seated beliefs and often implicit norms and values about *who* should be educated and *how* they should be educated. When new organizational arrangements—in this case, radically different ways of organizing instruction and defining educational leadership—are introduced, practical actors often resort to standard operating procedures, defend their previous actions based on their often implicit norms and values.

The SDCS reform was built on the assumption that effective teaching can be learned. But all learning is influenced by the social and organizational environments in which it occurs and by the pre-existing beliefs that individuals bring to the learning task. The process is complicated, because as Hargreaves (1994: 256) has pointed out " . . . teachers' beliefs and practices are grounded not only in experience and altruism, but also in structures and routines to which they have become attached, and in which considerable self-interest may be invested." Hargreaves' observations about teachers apply equally to all other educators within an educational system (Fullan, 1999: 64; Healey & DeStefano, 1997: 10-11; Stein & Gewirtzman, 2003: 2ff). That is, the learning of teachers, principals, and district leaders will interact with their pre-existing beliefs, standard operating procedures, and routines that are rooted in organizational culture. Instructional practices and standard operating procedures both reflect and construct teachers' ideas about education. Just as teachers' dispositions and perceptions are evident in their practice, so too, are their practices continually shaped by their beliefs. It is doubtful that a school district that is unable to change the beliefs, norms, and practices of its teachers and obtain their support for a reform's objectives will achieve systemic, enduring change. This reculturation is not a simple task, because as Deal & Peterson (1999: 182) suggest: "School cultures are complex webs of traditions and rituals that have been built up over time . . . . Cultural patterns are highly enduring, have a powerful impact on performance and shape the way people think, act, and feel."

Cultural Clashes Over Norms, Beliefs, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS)

SDCS teachers' notions of schooling were visible in their practices and beliefs and reflected the characterization presented by Deal and Peterson (1999) quoted above. Teachers who resisted the reforms did so because these changes flew in the face of their perceptions of good teaching and learning and because they were asked to make significant changes in their standard operating procedures and well-worn practices.

Rearranging Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Convinced that students—especially those from low income neighborhoods—would not survive in college or the world of work unless their literacy skills improved, district leaders mandated the Balanced Literacy Program (described in Stein et al 2003) in all elementary, middle, and high

schools. At its core, the Balanced Literacy Program required teachers to transform what they thought of as knowledge, how students learn that knowledge, and what the teacher's role was in encouraging students' development of knowledge. This Balanced Literacy Program is challenging to learn and thus required the intense commitment of teachers and principals that, in turn, rested on a re-organization of their beliefs, practices, and understandings.

In addition, this reform initiative required considerable changes in the standard operating procedures of schools. Schools were directed to devote between 2 and 3 hours to literacy instruction each day. Because their schedules were not rigidly segmented into time blocks, elementary schools could make this adjustment in their standard operating procedures, albeit with some difficulty. But because their schedules *were* rigidly divided into 50 minute or 120 minute periods, instituting a 2- or 3-hour literacy block in high school required considerable rearrangements of master schedules, teaching assignments and other SOPs. To accommodate 2- and 3-hours of literacy instruction, electives were pushed to the margins of high school course offerings, new teachers, and teachers from disciplines other than English were recruited to teach genre studies courses. These changes in SOPs caused friction in some communities and placed less-than-qualified teachers in some vitally important genre studies classes.

From Private Practice to Public Practice

The district leaders' attempt to convert their schools into "learning communities" was one of the most visible cultural changes articulated by the reform. The prevailing practice in K-12 education enables teachers to act as autonomous agents. Consistent with the highly prized value of academic freedom, teachers have been relatively free to assemble the curriculum and instruction they enact in their classroom. District leaders concluded that this "private practice" seldom synchronized and calibrated teachers' practices across classrooms at one school and across schools within a district. Moreover, if teaching is a learned profession, district leaders reasoned, there should be some shared and valued practices visible in all classrooms. Therefore, district leaders attempted to "reculture" (Hargreaves, 1994) teaching from private practice to communities of public practice. This reculturation involved opening classroom doors to principals' and coaches' scrutiny, working collaboratively with peers to solve common problems, and developing common thoughts, beliefs and language about skills, practices, and accountability. Many teachers—following the lead of the SDEA leadership--resisted these changes in their practices when they first encountered them because they challenged their beliefs that they had earned autonomy—the right to teach as they saw fit—when they received their teaching credentials. The SDEA leaders resented walkthroughs, coaches, and other calls for public practice as intrusions into their professional integrity.

From the point of view of their designers, walkthrough events were intended to educate administrators about the state of teaching and learning in the classroom. These events, however, especially challenged teachers' beliefs that they had earned the right to practice their craft in private. Teachers' practice was to be visible to principals and district instructional leaders because district leaders believed that this orientation encouraged the sharing of ideas, thereby leading to a coherent theory enacted consistently in practice across all schools in the district. If principals and coaches could visit classrooms unannounced, then teachers could no longer teach in isolation behind closed doors.

Even more than a perceived invasion of privacy and challenge to hard-earned autonomy, the SDEA characterized the walkthrough to be a "gotcha moment," particularly in the early days of the reform. The walkthrough event was compromised in large measure when teachers perceived them to be evaluative, particularly those conducted, unannounced, by the principal during the normal course of the teaching day. Those teachers who reported being suspicious of the event said they felt that their principals were not offering them the kind of constructive help they required to meet the demands that were placed upon them. Recognizing that the time principals and Instructional Leaders were in their classrooms could not possibly allow for an adequate representation of their teaching and learning, teachers admitted that they often put on a show for the observers (cf. McNeill 2002). When teachers feared the threat of surveillance, walkthroughs became impediments to, not supports of, teaching and learning.

Disciplinary Specialists or Reading Specialists?

Another significant reform move that clashed with teachers' beliefs about their instructional role was generated when district leaders—especially Instructional Leaders--tried to convince high school principals and their teachers to emphasize the teaching of reading strategies. Principals knew that their teachers were reluctant to relinquish their emphasis on teaching academic subject matter. They insisted that high school teachers knew how and wanted to teach Biology, Algebra and English Literature--such as the plot and characters of *Romeo and Juliet*--but they neither knew how nor wanted to teach reading strategies.

Instructional Leaders responsible for building high school principals' instructional knowledge also had to motivate them to address recalcitrant teachers who frequently chanted "high school is different," and "elementary school teachers should teach reading, not high school teachers." To convince high school teachers that they had a responsibility to teach disciplinary knowledge *and* reading strategies, principals had to be armed with a theory that supported their work and articulate the rationale for the reform explicitly. But Instructional Leaders themselves were often not prepared for either of these new responsibilities, which led to gaps in communication and understanding among instructional leaders, principals, and teachers.

Responsibility for Students' Learning: Teachers Teaching or Students Studying?

The reform also challenged deep-seated cultural belief and norms associated with the teaching-learning process. Many teachers and the SDEA leaders who opposed the reform expressed the belief that it was their job to teach—to present the material; it was the students' responsibility to learn—to 'get it.' If students didn't get it—then it was the student's fault; it was not the teacher's responsibility to change instruction to meet students' needs.

District leaders—from the superintendent to those at school-sites--asserted that all children can learn and it is the teachers' responsibility to find the means to actualize this basic principle of the reform. This idea—that teachers' high expectations and instruction can improve students' academic performance—challenged yet another belief, widely held among educators (and supported by certain interpretations of the sociological literature) that asserts social factors outside the school, such as students' impoverished conditions, their lack of mastery over the

English language, and their frequent movement between schools, are reasons why students don't learn. Some teachers and the SDEA leadership complained that the district's focus on instruction as the means to close the achievement gap did not give enough weight to the influence of students' social circumstances and instead blamed teachers for students' failures.

Instructional vs. Operational Leadership

A fourth set of clashes based in institutional culture erupted over one of the most basic tenets of the reform: that area superintendents and principals abandon their operational responsibilities and become instructional leaders. Instructional leaders became responsible to teach and support teachers in the successful enactment of the reform. This demand challenged some Instructional Leaders' and principals' strongly held beliefs about schooling, modified standard operating procedures about their leadership role, and challenged their expertise.

Teaching the reading process is difficult for any educator, even those Instructional Leaders who had been elementary school principals, because few had learned to teach reading in the manner advocated by the district. Moreover, many Instructional Leaders rose through the ranks on the operational and administrative side of the district and were not prepared in reading development. For them, communicating the intricacies of the Balanced Literacy Framework was challenging. Leveling books, conferring with students for the purpose of understanding if they were in "just right books," and conducting "Guided Reading" sessions were some of the strategies associated with the Balanced Literacy program that were foreign to them.

An additional controversy erupted over the rationale for applying the Balanced Literacy strategies. While highly valued in elementary instruction, they were perplexing in high school classrooms. For example, considerable disagreement swirled around the value of leveling books for high school students, although it was a high priority goal set by district leaders.

Political Clashes Between the Districts' Theory of Action and Valued Constituencies

A variety of issues initiated in local, state, and federal contexts influenced the manner in which the reform took shape and the extent to which leaders could focus on instructional issues. Although a number of factors initiated by federal and state policy influenced the reform (such as the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that imposed a rigorous accountability scheme, California's Proposition 227 that eliminated the use of students' native language as a medium of instruction, and the State's budget crisis that required drastic cost-cutting measures), we will confine our comments in this section to the influence of the business and local communities, the school board, and the teachers' union.

Business Community and School Board Politics

During the tenure of the previous SDCS superintendent, local business leaders became increasing vocal about the poor preparation of high school graduates when they joined their firms. The selection of Alan Bersin as Superintendent and the election of board members who would support his reforms have been attributed to invigorated business interest in the San Diego

schools. A consortium of business groups bankrolled Anthony Alvarado's bi-coastal leadership in the first year of the reform, including airplane travel between New York and San Diego, so that he could smooth the transition to new leadership in NYCD#2 while assuming new responsibilities in San Diego.

The business community's commitment to the reforms under Bersin and Alvarado was also evident by their stands on public initiatives. For example, early in the reform, some members of the San Diego Business Roundtable for Education expressed public support for a voucher initiative. They implored the Business Roundtable as a whole to support it. But after a debate on the issue during a regular business meeting, the Roundtable voted *not* to support the voucher initiative, saying that to do so would undercut their stated commitment to the Bersin/Alvarado reform effort and because the voucher plan did not meet the needs of special education students. While business support of the SDCS reform was strong, especially in its formative stages, it produced difficulties as well. The strategic decision by Bersin and Alvarado to move the reform quickly to maintain the support of the business community before cultivating teacher buy-in antagonized many teachers, and certainly the San Diego Educators Association, who complained bitterly that the reform was top-down and imported and ignored the voices and expertise of local educators (CTA 2002).

While the San Diego reform was contentious on the local scene, it received a much more favorable reaction nationally. Bersin garnered praise in the State and across the nation for his work in public education. The Education Trust, a nationally prominent educational reform organization that promotes the standards and accountability movement, praised the SDCS for its students' gains on standardized tests from 1998-2002: "San Diego's scores clearly reveal a pattern we hope to see in any community as diverse as this one: an 'everybody wins' scenario in which scores rise for all groups while gaps between groups get narrower" (Haycock & Jerald 2002). The American Federation of Teachers awarded Alvarado their "Quality Educational Standards in Teaching Award" in 1999 (SDUT 1999b). Numerous articles, which cast a generally positive light on events in San Diego, appeared in newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and the Washington Post.

More tangibly than conferred prestige, the reform captured the attention of private foundations and funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Broad Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, and a consortium of Qualcomm, Applied Microcircuits and the Wiatt Family Foundation, which made sizable gifts and grants to the district. The most notable of these was a $22.5 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

As an indication of the depth of local hostility, this national notoriety was used against the district's administration. The Gates/Hewlett and Atlantic Philanthropies grants caused controversy because their awards were conditional on the continued service of Bersin and Alvarado as district leaders (Magee, 2001b). Critics of this condition, including school board member Francis O'Neill Zimmerman and John Warren, the editor of *Voice and Viewpoint*, the paper of the San Diego's African American community (Warren, 2001), saw in this transaction further evidence of the heavy hand of Bersin and Alvarado coupled with the business community wresting control of the schools from parents and voters: "The school board is supposed to have control over monies that come under its oversight. You either want to have your elected representatives be responsible for your school district or you don't. This is about privatizing education through these grants" (Zimmerman quoted in Magee, 2001b:A1).

The school board was consistently divided 3-2 in favor of the Bersin-Alvarado led reforms. This split produced many long and contentious board meetings and public disagreements that detracted from the reform's intent to concentrate extensively on improving instruction. For example, the school board approved the *Blueprint* by a 3-2 vote on March 14, 2000 after a raucous 6-hour meeting marked by protests (Magee 2000b). Bersin was awarded a second 4-year term as Superintendent which extended his contract to 2006 on April 9, 2002 also by a 3-2 vote (Magee 2002a). In an episode emblematic of the discourse consistently marking board meetings, the majority bloc of Board President Ron Ottinger and trustees Sue Braun and Ed Lopez praised Bersin for delivering bold initiatives to classrooms and strengthening teaching quality, while the board minority of John deBeck and Francis O'Neill Zimmerman countered that Bersin alienated the public, sacrificed comprehensive education for a narrow literacy focus, and politicized the school system. Other highlights, or should we say lowlights, include a school board member, wishing in an e-mail that she could shoot the two dissenting members of the board.[1]

Teachers' Union Disputes with the District

In promoting the progressive ideal of closing the achievement gap, the district leadership called attention to the poor performance of students in certain schools, almost all of which were "South of 8" (the freeway that serves as the symbolic and material border between more- and less-affluent neighborhoods in San Diego) and allocated significant material resources to these "focus schools." They also appropriated Haycock & Navarro's (1988) national finding (replicated locally [Mehan & Grimes, 1999])--that low performing schools tend to be in low income neighborhoods and tend to have teachers who have the least teaching experience and the least professional qualifications (such as degrees and credentials). The reciting of these "social facts" was intended to rally the community, especially parents of color, by admitting that the public school system had not served their children well and encouraging support for a more rigorous curriculum and higher quality instruction.

This rhetorical move was accompanied by another. Guided by Resnick's (1995: 56) formulation that "effort actually *creates* ability," the leadership of the San Diego City Schools took the idea "that people can become smart by working hard at the right kinds of learning tasks" seriously. While well aware of the sociological literature (e. g., Coleman et al, 1966; Jencks et al, 1972; Jencks et al., 1978; Jencks and Phillips, 1998) that says the socioeconomic conditions that students bring with them to school are more influential on their academic outcomes than what happens inside schools, Bersin and Alvarado used the idea that effort can create ability to do the important rhetorical work of blocking critics' statements about the constraints imposed by students' socioeconomic conditions. The district leaders often chided critics when they invoked students' impoverished conditions, their lack of mastery over the English language, their frequent movement between schools as reasons why students don't learn. Bersin and Alvarado dismissed these conditions as unacceptable "excuses" for not engaging students in rigorous instruction. They insisted teachers work with each and every child, and then each and every child will learn.

These rhetorical moves, intended to be a call to arms, spawned an unfortunate side effect, especially among some members of the teaching corps, however. Teachers felt that they had been unfairly blamed for the achievement gap and some parents and students agreed with them.

Adding to this perception of blame was a perception of disrespect—that local teachers' knowledge didn't count; only the expertise of people from New York City and New Zealand (the home of the Balanced Literacy program adopted by SDCS) mattered. This perception had empirical support. In their survey of district teachers, principals, and peer coaches, AIR (2002: V-10) reported that 88% of 1294 teachers responding, 48% of 130 peer coaches/staff developers responding, and 25% of 109 principals responding said they were not involved in decisions about the implementation of the *Blueprint,* and only 38.5% of 1294 teachers responding felt respected as a teacher by district staff AIR (2002:V-14).

These findings are troubling in light of the literature on the importance of "teacher buy in" or "relations of trust" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) for successful school reforms. Datnow (2000) for instance, studied the implementation of 12 separate reform designs in 22 school sites and concluded that new programs are not successful without meaningful involvement of teachers in their adoption and implementation. The process of adoption, Datnow says, echoing Fullan (1991), is as important as the reform itself. There is a world of difference, she says, between compliance with the parameters of a particular solution and genuine support for its principles. The San Diego Education Association (a local chapter of the National Education Association) coalesced these expressions of disrespect, rejection, and rebuff into planks in a political platform of opposition to the reform. Although the teachers' union was initially supportive of the hiring of Bersin and Alvarado, once the two leaders began the reform without explicitly including the union in decision-making, the union became a voice of opposition. The SDEA often cited a poll of its membership, in which the vast majority report feeling that they did not had an influence over district decisions, didn't have confidence in the *Blueprint*, or the superintendent (CTA 2002: 4). During the run-up to the November 2002 school board election, the California Teachers Association pledged $24,000 (Magee 2000c) to support the re-election of a board member and the election of a candidate who opposed many dimensions of the Bersin-Alvarado reform. The SDEA's opposition to the SDCS reform was encapsulated in an extensive article in the *California Educator*, the magazine of the California Teachers Association. "Administrative meddling;" "terror in management;" "top-down dictatorship;" "one-size curriculum and professional development;" "dumbed down" science curriculum; elimination of art, social sciences, and music; and a general disregard of teacher expertise were among the litany of complaints and criticisms chronicled in the article (CTA 2002)

Community Concerns in Affluent Neighborhoods

In discussions of the political dimensions of educational reform, the "community" is often considered—but unfortunately as a monolithic entity. San Diego is no different than other large cities in that it has a variety of communit*ies—*many of which have impacted the San Diego reform, albeit in different ways. In this and the next section we present the concerns of community members in more- and less-affluent neighborhoods.

Parents and community leaders in virtually all neighborhoods applauded the district's successful campaign in 1998 to pass a $1.51 billion bond referendum for school construction, repairs, and renovation (Proposition MM) and "San Diego Reads," a book drive to put more books in schools and classrooms. While supporting these material aspects of the reform, parents in San Diego's affluent neighborhoods lambasted the pedagogical dimensions of the reform. They said the 2-

and 3- hour literacy blocks watered down instruction, forced more valued elective courses from the students' course of study, and restricted teachers' creativity. There was some evidence to support this claim. The number of sections devoted to support the district's untracking program for underrepresented students (Achievement Via Individual Determination [AVID]) was reduced in SDCS 19 high schools; AVID reached a peak of 59 sections in 1998-99 and 1999-2000, but dropped to 44 in 2000-01 (Swanson, personal communication). Parents in wealthy neighborhoods also derided the district's new physics program because they said its textbooks lacked the rigor needed for a college-prep curriculum and because it was mandated for all 9th graders. A coalition of wealthy parents and teachers from La Jolla exercised their social capital and negotiated concessions from the district over these complaints. La Jolla High School was granted "pilot" status, which exempts the school from conformity to the reform after the coalition of parents and teachers threatened to form an independent charter school.

Community Concerns in Less Affluent Neighborhoods

Parents and community activists in San Diego's less affluent and predominantly ethnic neighborhoods voiced different concerns than their more affluent contemporaries, albeit no less stridently. First some background. The San Diego City Schools are "majority minority schools." At the time the Bersin-Alvarado reforms were introduced, non-whites accounted for 72.6% of the district's students: Latinos 37.5%; African Americans 16.5%; Filipino 8%; Indochinese 6.3%; Asian: 2.7%; Pacific Islander 1.0%; Alaskan/Indian: 0.6% (SDCS, 2001).
Winning the favor of local constituencies was complicated by the past histories of the district leaders . Bersin, is an attorney, whose former position was US Attorney for the Southern Region of the US. One of his primary responsibilities was guarding the US-Mexico border from illegal immigrants. When he became responsible for a school district with a high proportion of low-income Latinos, his motives and values were called into question, especially by groups representing low-income Latinos. When Bersin appointed the prominent educator, Anthony Alvarado, some critics were mollified. But when Alvarado tried to smooth his transition to his successor in District #2 by shuttling back and forth between New York and San Diego, he was not able to devote the time necessary to make the personal connections to educators and the community that are so vital to a leader's success. Instead, both were vilified as outsiders by the critics of their reform.
The "Latino Coalition," one particularly vocal group within the Latino community supported the *Blueprint* for 18 months because of its promise to close the achievement gap, but withdrew its support in the Fall of 2000 because their leaders said the reforms were not meeting the needs of the English Language Learners, the management and school leadership profiles did not reflect the diversity of the students in the school district, and the district was diminishing due process and respect for parents (Latino Coalition 2001).
In addition, a combination of community groups, supported by the board minority, accused the district of making administrative decisions "top-down"--without parent or community consultation--from 1998-2001. Examples of heavy-handed decision making that were cited include the removal of district administrators in 1999, school principals each year of the reform, Title I aides from classrooms in 2000 (Gembrowski, 2000), and a popular Latino high school principal—just a few weeks before graduation (tenBerge, 2001).

Whereas parents in affluent neighborhoods have traded their social capital for concessions from the district, parent and community groups in less affluent neighborhoods were not able to so; instead, they resorted to walkouts, lawsuits and appeals to the US and California Secretaries of Education--most notably to reinstate fired principals and Title I aides (Magee, 2000a; Magee & Daniels, 2002). These attempts to wrest changes from the district by legal means have not been as successful as the arrangements negotiated in well-to-do neighborhoods. For example, after a 14-month investigation, the California Department of Education concluded the district did nothing illegal when using federal funds to pay for the reforms, but they criticized the district for failing to consult with parents, as the law requires (Magee, 2001a). Theresa Creber, parent and activist, was quoted (on News 8, 2001) as being pleased about the result: "Parents want to help their children achieve and I feel the district also wants them to achieve it. They just left parents out of the loop and it's important to have partnership of parents and teachers with the district." Bersin (2002c) also announced that the US Secretary of Education, Ron Paige, had approved the district's use of Title I money for teachers instead of aides; indeed Paige said that San Diego's approach will become a model for other districts.

PART 3: CHANGES IN THE REFORM

INFLUENCED BY CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICT

As we related in the previous section, the district's theory of action that placed instructional change on the leading edge of the reform agenda, coupled with the fast-paced, comprehensive and centralized control of reform ideas generated conflict within the district and between the district leaders and valued constituencies. While the fast pace, centralized control, and commitment to raising student achievement won the district leadership the support of the powerful local business community, the national press, and granting agencies, it did not secure teacher-buy in, or win significant union, community or unanimous school board support. The resulting political and cultural conflicts combined with a devastating state budget crisis, led the SDCS reform in new directions.

A certain amount of political conflict was not unexpected by the district leadership. Insofar as they engaged in the reculturation process quickly—"jolting the system" is the way Bersin and Alvarado described their strategy—the district leadership was aware that their actions would arouse passions and produce negative reactions. They believed, however, that this conflict was necessary to move the system forward—"you have to break a few eggs to make an omelet"--is the way Bersin (personal communication) often expressed his conviction that introducing a certain amount of conflict was preferable to the slow process entailed in building a consensus model of educational change. But the political and cultural conflicts that we described above were more severe than the district leaders anticipated, which caused them to modify their reforms in ways not initially anticipated.

Calls for Collaboration by Business and Opinion Leaders Accelerated Change

The reorientation of the theory of action guiding reform efforts in the SDCS was accelerated in large part by the fatigue settling within the powerful business community over the constant battles waged over the reforms. Business and opinion leaders began to echo the call for

negotiation, collaboration, and reciprocity consistently voiced by members of historically disenfranchised communities.

Ginger Hovenic, Executive Director of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce Business Roundtable for Education, an early supporter of the Bersin-Alvarado reforms, changed her position as the political discourse grew more corrosive. In 1999, while endorsing school board members who voted with Bersin, she said: "(Bersin) needs support, he needs to have the backing of the (school) board. He needs to have the board in support of his activities and the agenda he has going" (quoted in Magee, 1999: B1). But in 2001, she called for more open lines of communication between the district office, teachers, parents, and the school board. In an editorial that appeared in the the *San Diego Transcript*, a business oriented newspaper, she (Hovenic, 2002) re-capped the first 3 years of the Bersin-Alvarado administration in positive terms, and praised them for passing Proposition MM, then turned her attention to the reform process: "There needs to be far wider district and community-level collaboration on something as massive and high stakes as a program that affects the educational fates of hundreds of thousands of present and future students. The needed time to reflect and provided constructive feedback would be especially more valuable for the more than 8,600 teachers and other certificated employees in the district who are directly affected by the *Blueprint*. While teachers have said they support the teaching strategies in general, they've barely had time to learn how it works, much less to see how it affects their students in the big picture. . . . With no time for reflection or the opportunity to provide meaningful input into the program, the district risks losing the level of understanding and support on the part of teachers needed to make the *Blueprint* strategies truly effective in San Diego's classrooms. . . . Without such buy in, we can only hope for the best."

Like business leaders, editorial writers for the San Diego Union Tribune were strong supporters of the reform. For example, an SDUT (1999b) editorial in September 1999 praised Bersin's first year in office with the headline: "Bersin's rookie year | School superintendent gets an A for tenacity." In September 2001 they called upon the school board to renew Bersin's contract: "Schools chief merits four more years" (SDUT, 2001). But as relations between the district office, teachers and the union continued to deteriorate, they adopted a decidedly critical stance-- even calling upon Bersin to fire Alvarado:

"For the sake of San Diego children and the city's future, the city school board and teachers' union and the bemired superintendent, Alan Bersin, must, on each side, make startling concessions early in 2002. But not in school standards. It's time Bersin shows he can persuade and lead or find a strong-willed deputy gifted in communications skills to help him. *He should replace Tony Alvarado, a now expendable target of angry teachers."* (Morgan, 2001). [emphasis added]

This shift in support of local opinion and political leaders was reinforced by external evaluators. The first edition of a multi-year independent study of reforms in the schools (AIR 2002) praised the district for its bold approach to literacy instruction and its commitment to raise student achievement, but assailed the district for fostering a "climate of fear and suspicion." Lead researcher Beverly Farr urged the school board to develop better ways to collaborate with teachers and parents or risk losing this ambitious plan to help the district's students—especially those struggling the most (Farr 2002). Farr's recommendations were endorsed by the San Diego Union Tribune editorial writers, who implored Bersin and Alvarado to "take the initiative in bridging the communication gap" (SDUT 2002).

The Removal of Anthony Alvarado:

A "Design Genius" and a "Lightning Rod for Controversy"

Superintendent Bersin, unhappy with the lack of improvement in students' achievement, feeling educators' pressure against a "one size fits all" approach, and criticisms from opinion and business leaders concerning dysfunctional school board and union-district relations, and emboldened by new ideas from the Gates Foundation and Carnegie Corporation, removed Alvarado from the leadership of the reform. In his message to the District[2] explaining why he removed Alvarado, Bersin (2002b) credited Alvarado for his "design genius," whose "work rightfully earned the praise of all." But, he phased out this controversial leader "to ease tensions" and to give "teachers more discretion in reform implementation." After the School Board restructured Alvarado's contract, Bersin was quoted as saying "Alvarado's genius is in designing educational reform," but he is a "lightning rod" that makes the change process more difficult (Moran 2003a).

In these formulations, Bersin is depicted as making a painful decision based on political pressure exerted upon him from within the organization. In granting autonomy to teachers, Bersin turned away from one of Alvarado's hallmark ideas that autonomy is something that teachers earn through improved teaching practice; it is not something that is granted as soon as teachers obtain their credential or as the result of a politically negotiated compromise.

The Limitations of Dual Leadership

The particularities of the dual leadership arrangement between Bersin and Alvarado had to contribute to the characterization of Alvarado as controversial and contentious. Leadership responsibilities were arranged so that Bersin "faced out" to the communities and Alvarado "faced in" to the organization in order to improve instruction. Bersin's shield buffered Alvarado from political squabbles; but it also constrained him from personally engaging his detractors.

In his final interview with us, Alvarado (2003: 14) lamented that he didn't personally spend sufficient time building "a series of very strong relationships" with educators throughout the system--school board members, the union president, and classroom teachers. Spending his time, adding his personal touch, and conveying his deep knowledge of the reform might have won over his critics, he mused. Referring to one staunch critic he said, "I should have met with her three times a week. I would have asked her for her help and I would have taken her to classrooms all of the time to see what this [the reform] was about and talked to her about it" (Alvarado, 2003: 13). Equally importantly, building what Bryk & Schneider (2003) have called "relationships of trust" would have enabled him and his colleagues to gauge the progress of the work, reflect on it in order to make adjustments before the work got off course, and to let good ideas bubble up from the field and become integrated into their models.

It was easier for critics to attack ideas associated with Alvarado's disembodied apparition than ideas embodied in a charismatic person. During the first 18 months of the Bersin-Alvarado regime, Alvarado made repeated trips back to New York to smooth the transition for his replacement; this necessity combined with the dual leadership arrangements that kept Alvarado

inside the district, exacerbated Alvarado's disconnection from the San Diego communities. In the absence of tangible and personal connections to Alvarado and his reform ideas, critics attacked abstractions without effective rejoinder.

In other words, the dual leadership arrangement blocked Alvarado from developing his own bank of social capital with San Diego's communities. Focused within, he did not personally connect to relevant constituencies outside the schools, which meant he accumulated a limited bank of capital from personal relationships when political circumstances called for it. The image of an "outsider" who was insensitive to the knowledge and expertise that existed in the San Diego community haunted his tenure.

Our analysis of these circumstances should not be construed to mean that we conclude that the dual leadership arrangement is fundamentally flawed. Even though it did not work in this specific instance for reasons that were not foreseen at the outset, the potential of this arrangement should not be discarded. Large urban school districts are so complicated that shared responsibilities and a division of leadership are ideas that need further exploration.

Changes in the Theory of Action Guiding Reform

Changes in the theory of action guiding the SDCS school reform accompanied Alvarado's departure. Starting in 2003 it became more incremental in scope and differentiated by locale (reform elements will be implemented differently in different schools and not in all schools), decentralized in direction (school sites are more responsible for generating reform ideas that improve their schools), and slower in pace (not all schools will make changes at the same time). These changes made it less contentious because district leaders recognized that "one size does *not* fit all."

The district's acceptance of an $8 million grant from Carnegie's "Schools For a New Society" initiative in partnership with New American Schools (NAS) and an $11.4 million grant from the Gates Foundation also in partnership with NAS helped reshape the district's theory of action regarding high schools away from a one that leads with instruction to one that leads with structural changes. The district now emphasizes organizational changes such as redesigning and personalizing schools as precursors to instructional improvement.

The district's large comprehensive high schools are arranged [3] into groups with similar strengths and needs to enable each school to address academic rigor, personalization, and leadership issues according to local needs in the context of an overall framework of non-negotiable principles. Because the district leaders recognize that schools have different needs and problems, they will not approach them with the same uniform strategy. Principals and teachers in each school have been encouraged to think creatively to establish different means to achieve those overarching goals (Hopper, 2003b).

Schools that have scored above the 7th percentile on the annual API index are granted considerable, but not complete, autonomy in their educational plans. These schools will be "challenged" to develop a school accountability contract based on the state accountability system coupled with additional district-specific targets to "close the achievement gap" between ethnic and socio-economic groups of students. The students in each of these 7 schools score in the aggregate above the API 7 mark, but when groups are disaggregated by ethnicity and SES, the record of some of these schools declines; Blacks and Latinos do not score above API 7 although

whites and Asians do. For this reason, Bersin is charging these schools to bring all students up to at least the API 7 standard (Bersin, 2003a; Hopper 2003b).

With support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, five comprehensive high schools are being redesigned into "small schools" with themes, such as construction, art, marine biology, law and public policy that are intended to entice students to them (Bersin, 2003a; Hopper, 2003b). The SDCS is also building new freestanding small schools. An infusion of new ideas and extramural resources will guide this process. Like the redesign schools, new small schools will have a theme that is intended to provide a "common intellectual purpose" for the curriculum (Bersin, 2003a; Hopper 2003b). Some schools situated in well-to-do neighborhoods have not been successful in retaining resident students who leave the neighborhood to attend public schools elsewhere, or, to attend private college prep schools. These "community engagement" high schools will be expected to work with the middle schools and elementary schools in their neighborhoods to raise expectations for students and improve academic quality through curriculum units of study linked to state academic standards in order to re-attract neighborhood students (Bersin, 2003a; Hopper 2003b). Principals and teachers from schools which educate unconventional students will form a learning community of alternative schools to refresh their purpose, develop a long-range plan for improving academic rigor, apply learning issues to acceleration and graduation, and develop site-specific measures for monitoring student progress and developing middle college relationships with local community colleges (Bersin, 2003a; Hopper 2003b).

This thinking marks a sharp departure from the theory of action that prevailed from 1998-2002. Superintendent Bersin continues to insist that improving instructional quality for all students in the district remains central to the district's vision. But he also claims that he has learned that improving student achievement and enhancing student engagement requires reshaping school structure before attempting to improve instruction (Bersin, personal communication). More, specifically, he says, the diverse nature of district high schools requires diverse reform efforts while maintaining high quality standards at each site.

Organizational Changes Accompanying High School Reform Strategies

Significant organizational changes in both the central office and between the central office and school sites accompany this differentiated approach to high school reform.

Reorganizing the District Office and Arrangements with High Schools

The symbols of the Alvarado-inspired theory of action—"Institute for Learning," "Chancellor of Instruction"—have been erased and replaced by new organizational arrangements. In Spring 2003 Mary Hopper was appointed Chief Academic Officer, assuming many of the responsibilities formerly carried out by Tony Alvarado when he served as Chancellor of Instruction. Effective with the 2004-05 academic year, she was appointed Chief Administrative Officer. A new position, Deputy Superintendent, was created and a new Chief of Staff was appointed. Alvarado's main organizational innovation, the Institute for Learning, was reorganized and renamed the Office of Instructional Support. A new position, "High School Reform Administrator" was created, the incumbent of which is responsible for the Community

Engagement and Challenge School reform initiatives. These changes are material as well as symbolic.

Cautious Moves toward Decentralization

What we have characterized as the *centralized direction* of the reform, the district's critics characterized derisively as a *"top down" control* of the reform. This tactic, they said, excluded valuable constituencies. The teachers' union (SDEA) complained that Bersin and Alvarado's top-down management style excluded teachers—who, the union leadership asserted, had the expertise to raise student achievement, had they been consulted. School Board members John deBeck and Francis O'Neill Zimmerman constantly asserted that Bersin alienated the public, sacrificed broad liberal arts and science education for a narrow literacy focus, and politicized the school system.

Superintendent Bersin recommended that eligible school sites be given more discretion in the expenditure of Title I funds starting with the 2003-04 academic/fiscal year: "it is timely and appropriate to provide sites with greater flexibility as they continue their efforts to improve student achievement" (Bersin, 2003). For the past several years, school sites have received 20% of their Title I allocation as discretionary funds; Bersin asked the School Board to raise this limit to 50% starting with the 2003-04 school year (Hopper, 2003a). This increase in school-based discretionary funding helped the district address the state-wide budget crisis and gave Bersin some much-needed political capital with schools and the community.

Decision-making was shared even more extensively starting in 2004-05. To help balance the district's $1.1 billion budget, the average-size elementary school had to cut an estimated $42,000, the average middle school lost $265,000 and the average high school had to reduce its budget by $380,000 (Magee, 2004). Bersin gave principals and their parent and employee advisory groups the power to decide where cuts should be made at their schools. The irony of the timing to decentralize decision-making--specifically inviting school-site leadership teams to make difficult decisions in hard budgetary times--was not lost on some principals: "I agree with the idea of giving principals more power," one principal observed. "I hope that when we are in good budget times, we still have the power" (quoted in Magee 2004).

PART 4: LESSONS LEARNED

School change is a multi-faceted process with technical, cultural, and political dimensions. In the final analysis, the SDCS district's attempt to introduce wide-ranging and innovative changes reinforces what could be called "Sarason's Law:" Introducing innovations into complex systems such as school districts is treacherous because the existing system pushes back in sometimes predictable, sometimes mysterious ways. Three factors—one technical, one rooted in organizational culture, and one embedded in community politics--contributed to the changes we observed in the SDCS from 1998-2004.

The technical reason for these changes concerned the development of capacity. The Superintendent insists that Instructional Leaders and principals developed sufficient knowledge to lead instruction by 2003 so that he could delegate more responsibility to them (Bersin,

personal communication). The culturally-based reason for these changes concerned the meanings educators in various contexts within the educational system attributed to new norms, beliefs, and standard operating procedures. The district leaders' desire to convert the area superintendents' and principals' roles from operational to instructional, transform all their teachers into literacy instructors, and make teachers' practice public not private, collided with many educators' long standing and deeply held beliefs about leadership and teaching roles.

Political reasons for the changes in the district's theory of action emerged from the power dynamics of the local San Diego context. District leaders invested more heavily in building political alliances with powerful community and national groups than they did in cultivating "buy in" with educators up and down the line. As a result, the local teachers' union, a vocal school board minority, and advocacy groups based in well-to-do and less-well-to-do communities voiced loud and consistent opposition to the district's content-driven, comprehensive, and centralized reforms. Bersin, and Alvarado took a calculated risk that an "unrelenting top-down managerial direction at an accelerator-to-the-floor pace" (Cuban & Usdan, 2003: 82) would transform instruction that in turn would produce positive gains in students' performance. This evidence would convince all concerned about the efficacy of the reforms. In so far as Alvarado left the district and the district has modified its theory of action, we must conclude that gamble has not paid off.

In other words, the SDCS reform changed course because the district's centralized and fast-paced decision-making swamped the district's commitment to form communities of learners. In their exuberance to implement their content-driven reform as quickly as possible for the moral, political, and practical reasons we listed above, the district leaders underestimated the extent to which the actions taken by educators situated throughout the system influence reform. Educators in local contexts are active initiators, not passive implementers. Furthemore, they actively initiate actions in such "local contexts" as classrooms as well as the other intersection encounters we have studied: district leaders interacting with Instructional Leaders, Instructional Leaders interacting with principals, principals interacting with teachers. Whatever actions educators in these contexts take—including passively complying, faithfully enacting, actively enhancing, aggressively subverting--shape the reform.

That *shaping* is a vital part of what is meant by the co-construction of reform (Datnow et al., 2002). It means all participants "work together within the richness and against the limitations of multiple knowledge domains to create new knowledge" (Stein & Gewirtzman 2003: 7). And we would add: "all participants work together against the limitations of institutional cultural practices and political constraints." In order to engage in the co-construction of reform, all participants must develop trust in each other's expertise (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) and share a commitment to reach commonly shared institutional goals. Reaching organizational goals is a continuous and long-term process, not a one-time and short-term process. Once reform leaders recognize that the arrow of change can point in many directions not just from the top of the system to its bottom (Hall 1995; Oakes et al., 1999), and that reform is a messy, dialogic, and convoluted process, not a linear, direct, and rational process, then they may actively engage participants from all local contexts in the co-construction of reform instead of trying to impose on people even what they are certain are good ideas.

Organizational Change or Organizational Learning?

"Organizational learning" is the capacity of an organization such as a school system to adapt to changing circumstances (Argyris & Schön, 1978; 1996; Bryk, et al., 1998). It involves the modification of an organization's underlying norms, policies and goals. Certainly, we have evidence that the SDCS has made significant organizational *changes* in response to powerful political forces, un-planned fiscal constraints, and deep-seated cultural conflicts. However, it is not clear whether these organizational changes will remain institutionalized. We expect the district to experience even more changes because Alan Bersin is departing as Superintendent effective July 1, 2005.

Speed was of the essence; from 1998 to 2002, the district leadership attempted to introduce the balanced literacy model as quickly as possible. Bersin and Alvarado felt the moral imperative to implement reform quickly so that another generation of students would not be lost. They were convinced that significant change could not be accomplished piecemeal because the system has a way of absorbing innovation. They thought the reform had to be implemented quickly to ensure the continuation of the fragile commitment of the business community. In our previous paper (Stein et al., 2003), we discussed the detrimental impact that the fast pace of the reform had on the development of system-wide capacity for supporting the learning of teachers and others. Others have observed (Hightower, 2001; AIR 2002; Hubbard, 2004), that this district-wide effort was perceived by critics as top-down, inflexible, and unresponsive to local constituencies.

A combination of forces operated to shift the theory of action from a fast-paced, systemic effort to a slower-paced more incremental, differentiated, locally sensitive approach. The back draft from teachers, parents, and various community and opinion leaders combined with the development of sufficient instructional leadership capacity seems to have convinced the Superintendent to delegate more authority to school sites. The district leaders have also learned that a centralized and comprehensive (derisively called a "one size fits all") reform effort does not capture and utilize the expertise that exists in the district and community; indeed, it can repel colleagues and foster resistance. The tensions that emerged from the centralized and comprehensive reform efforts introduced from 1998-2002 taught district leaders that successful restructuring and re-culturing of schools requires that principals, teachers, parents, and community members be involved in planning changes and participating in the activities planned. The more incremental and differentiated approach is especially evident in high school reform. The Bersin-led high school initiative is incremental in that not all comprehensive high schools, pilot schools, charter schools and alternative high schools are on the same time-table or are enacting the same strategies for reform. The high school reform, with its emphasis on local solutions to general educational problems guided by a set of non-negotiable principles, adds a decentralized dimension to an incremental theory of action. The high school plan is decentralized in that each high school, or affinity cluster of schools, is recognized to have different needs and has authority delegated to them to reach goals.

Prospects for the Future

What implications do these developments have for our assessment of how reforms travel from one district to another and are institutionalized? Most clearly, they suggest that the level of

schooling matters. Reforms that were developed for and proved their effectiveness in elementary settings do not transfer automatically to middle and high school settings. In the New York/San Diego case, this should not have been surprising (in hindsight at least) as we know from research that (a) elementary students' learning trajectories in literacy are different from adolescents; and (b) the organization of high schools are very different from elementary schools. Yet, we don't know which of these incompatibilities was most responsible for the challenges experienced in San Diego high schools, or if—as might very well be the case—both were, thereby further illustrating the interactivity of the technical, structural, and cultural aspects of reform.

The leading edge of the Alvarado-inspired reform was instruction. Improved instruction leads to improved student learning and improved learning, in turn, leads to a culture change within schools, Alvarado asserted. All concerned would see the value of concentrating on instruction because there would be empirical evidence to support those claims. By contrast, the new Bersin-led redesign effort welds structural change to instructional change. The imperative--improve schools by making them smaller, more personal, or attractive to neighborhood parents--has supplanted the instruction-first mantra. Bersin insists that he has not abandoned the quest for improved classroom instruction; he now realizes, he has said, that he must build the conditions for instruction (by which he means smaller, more personalized schools with strong leadership) before concentrating resources on instructional improvement.

The problem, of course, is that change agents can get so absorbed by the practical problems associated with organizing the structural features (such as designing a new course schedule, assigning teachers to new theme-based small schools and deciding which small school gets the science labs or sports teams) that they never get around to doing the extremely hard work of improving instruction. If educators committed to redesigning large comprehensive high schools into smaller more responsive ones do not get past solving the practical problems, then the result will not be a paradigm shift in education but oases of excellence within a desert of mediocrity. Unfortunately, the choice of the leading edge of reform may be overtaken by political considerations. Bersin's term of office expired in June 2005 and a new superintendent takes office July 1, 2006. This superintendent will have to decide whether to pursue an instruction-first strategy, Bersin's new differentiated policies, or chart yet another new course of action. It will be interesting and informative to see what relation between instruction and structure emerges. Will the districts' teachers and principals continue to focus on instruction no matter what new reform strategies are adopted? That is, has the system developed sufficient capacity to sustain a focus on instruction regardless of political changes?

If the next superintendent approaches the district with new reform ideas, then we may have another example of a district caught in the "reform mill" (Oakes et al., 1999). If one more "new" reform idea replaces the Bersin- and Alavarado-inspired ones that preceded it, then it would be difficult to say that the SDCS organization as a whole has learned. Perhaps the new district leadership will change course based on past experience and changing circumstances, but if any new policies do not propel the district toward its clearly stated goals of closing the achievement gap by improving instruction, then we will not be able to say that this organization has learned.

References

AIR 2002. Evaluation of the Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards-based System. Palo Alto: American Institutes for Research. (submitted to the SDCS School Board Feb 12)

Alvarado, Anthony. 2003. Interview with Lea Hubbard, Hugh Mehan, & Mary Kay Stein. January 29.

Argyris, Chris and Donald Schön. 1978. Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective. Reading MA: Addison Wesley.

Bersin, Alan. 2002a. Message to All SDCS Employees. March 21.

Bersin, Alan. 2002b. Remarks to Business Roundtable for Education. September 12.

Bersin, Alan. 2003. Proposed Increase in Title I Site Discretionary Fund Allocations. Memorandum to the SDCS Board of Education. March 10.

Binder, Amy, J. 2002. Contentious Curricula: Afrocentrism and Creationsim in American Public Schools. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Brown, John Seeley &Paul Duguid. 1996. Organizational Learning and Communities of Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning and Innovation, pp. 58-82. In: Michael D. Cohen and Lee S. Sproull (Eds.), *Organizational Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage

Bryk, A. S., P. B. Sebring, D. Kenbow, S. Rollow, & J. Q. Easton. 1998. *Charting Chicago School Reform: Democratic Localism as a Lever for Change*. Boulder CO: Westview.

Bryk, Anthony S. & Barbara Schneider. 2003. *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*. New York: The Russell Sage Foundation.

California Teachers Association. 2002. Isn't It Time to Treat Teachers as Professionals? California Educator 6 (6): 1-14 http:www.cta.org/cal_educator/v6i6/feature_teachers.html

Coleman, J. S., E. Q. Campbell, C. J. Hobson, J. McPartland., A. M. Mood, F. D. Weinfeld, & R. L. York. (1966). *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, DC: US Office of Education.

Cuban, Larry & Michael Usdan. (2003). Fast and Top Down: Systemic Reform and Student Achievement in San Diego City Schools. In: Powerful Reforms With Shallow Roots (pp. 77-95). New York: Teachers' College Press.

Datnow, A. (2000). Power and politics in the adoption of school reform models. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22(4), 357-374.

Datnow, A., Hubbard, L., & Mehan, H. (2002). *Extending School Reform: From One School to Many*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Deal, T. and Kent Peterson (2000). Eight Roles of Symbolic Leaders. *In Educational Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass (pp. 202-212).

Elmore, R.E. (1996) 'Getting to scale with good educational practice'*, Harvard Educational Review* 66, 1: 1-26.

Farr, Beverly. 2002. Evaluation of the Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards-based System. Presentation to the SDCS School Board. February 12.

Fullan, Michael G. 1991 *The new meaning of educational change*, 2nd edition. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (1999) *Change Forces: The Sequel*. Philadelphia: Falmer Press/Taylor&Francis

Gembrowski, Susan, 2000. Bersin's Blueprint Draws Boos at Rally | Speakers Fear Cuts in Jobs, Programs. San Diego Union Tribune. March 12. B8

Hall, P. M. (1995). The consequences of qualitative analysis for sociological theory: Beyond the microlevel. *The Sociological Quarterly* 36 (2): 397-423.

Hargreaves, A. (1994) *Changing teachers, changing times*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Haycock, Kati, & Susanne Navarro. 1988. *Unfinished Business*. Oakland, CA: The Achievement Council.

Haycock, Kati & Craig Jerald. 2002. Report Card on Reform. San Diego Union Tribune. September.

Healey, F., & DeStefano, J. (1997). Education reform support: A Frameowrk for scaling up school reform. Wahsington, DC: Abel 2 Clearinghouse for Basic Edcuation.

Hightower, A. M. (2002). San Diego's Big Boom: Systemic Instructional Change in the Central Office and Schools. In:A M. Hightower, M. S. Knapp, J. A. Marsh & M. Mclaughlin (Eds.), *School Districts and Urban Renewal* (Pp. 76-94). New York: Teachers College Press.

Hopper, Mary (2003a). Proposed Use of Title I Funding 2003-04. Memorandum to Members of the District Advisory Committee, Principals and SSC Chairpersons. March 10, 2003.

Hopper, Mary (2003b). Status Report on District High School Reform. Minutes of the SDCS School Board, September 9. Document E.b.y.

Hovenic, Ginger. 2001 "Time needed to reflect on *Blueprint*." The San Diego Daily Transcript. May 17.

Hovenic, Ginger. 2002. Feedback Needed for the *Blueprint's* Success. San Diego Daily Transcript. Jan. 9.

Hubbard, Lea. 2004. The Benefits and Costs of Top Down Reform. Paper presented at AERA. San Diego California. April

Hubbard, Lea, Mary Kay Stein & Hugh Mehan. 2006. Reform as Learning: When School Reform Collides with School Culture and Community Politics. New York: Routledge Falmer

Jencks, Christopher et al. (1972). *Inequality*. New York: Basic Books.

Jencks, Christopher et al. (1978). *Who Gets Ahead?* New York: Basic Books.

Jencks, Christopher & Meridith Phillips 1998. *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institute.

Jones, Makeba, Susan Yonezawa, Elizabeth Ballesteros, & Hugh Mehan. 2002. Shaping Pathways to Higher Education. *Educational Researcher* 10: 1-13.

Latino Coalition 2001. Presentation to the SDCS Board, Oct.9.

Magee, Maureen. 1999. "Chamber keeps up its support of Bersin | Group won't back all of its original trustees. San Diego Union Tribune. November 13. page B-1

Magee, Maureen. 2000a. "Demoted administrators sue S.D. district, trustees" San Diego Union tribune January 8. B-7.

Magee, Maureen. 2000b. "Educators Prepare For Reform Plan. Bersin Plans Meetings With Parents, Teachers." San Diego Union Tribune. March 16.

Magee, Maureen. 2000c. School Board Hopefuls Get No Vacation in their Quest for Backers. | Bersin's Reform Plan is a Hot Button Issue. San Diego Union Tribune. March 12. B1.

Magee, Maureen. 2001a. "Schools in SD to get grant worth $5 million" San Diego Union Tribune /nov/ B1-B5.

Magee, Mauren (2001b). "School reform plan gets private boost, with a condition." San Diego Union Tribune. November 6. A1.

Magee, Maureen (2002a). Bersin's Contract Extended to 2006. San Diego Union Tribune. April 10.

Magee, Maureen (2002b). Bersin Says Alvarado's Role to be Curtailed. San Diego Union Tribune. December 6.

Magee, Maureen. 2004. SD Schools Help decide What to Cut. San Diego Union Tribune. January 8.

Magee, Maureen & Dwight Daniels. 2002. Fed-Up Parents Stage Walkout. San Diego Union Tribune. December 10.

McNeill, Linda. 2002. *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Educational Testing*. New York: Routledge.

Mehan, Hugh and Scott Grimes. 1997. Closing the Achievement Gap in the SDCS. La Jolla: San Diego Dialogue.

Moran, Chris (2003a). Chief S. D. School Reformer to Leave. February 5.

Moran, Chris. 2003b. Reassignments of Principals in S. D. City Schools District Upheld. San Diego Union Tribune. March 6.

Morgan, Neil. 2001. Good news for 2002: Some have made this city a world center. SDUT December 26.

Muñoz, Daniel L. 2001. San Diego Unified School District Trustees Threatened With Shooting. La Prensa. October 5.

News 8. (2001). Blueprint For Student Success Under Fire. May 29.

Oakes, J. (1992). Can tracking research inform practice? Technical, normative, and political considerations. *Educational Researcher* 2: 12-21.

Oakes, J., Wells, A. S., Jones, M. and Datnow, A. (1997) 'Detracking: The social construction of ability, cultural politics, and resistance to reform', *Teachers College Record* 98, 3: 482-510.

Oakes, J., Quartz, K. H., Ryan, S. & Lipton, M. (1999). *Becoming good American schools: The struggle for civic virtue in educational reform*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Powell, Walter. W & Dimaggio, Paul (Eds.). 1991. *The New institutionalism in organizational analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

PL 107-110. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. 115 Stat. 1425

Resnick, Lauren. 1995. From Aptitude to Effort: A New Foundation for Our Schools. *Daedalus* 12 (4): 55-62.

SDCS 2001a. Student Census 2000-2001. San Diego: SDCS.

San Diego Union Tribune. 1999a. "Teachers union honors Alvarado, Riley." July 17. B2.

San Diego Union Tribune. 1999b "Bersin's rookie year | School superintendent gets an A for tenacity." August 6. B2

San Diego Union Tribune. 2001. "Schools chief merits four more years". September 4. B2

San Diego Union Tribune. (2002). "End The Sniping: City Schools Antagonists Must Meet Half Way." February 17.

Stein, Mary Kay, Lea Hubbard, and Hugh Mehan. (2003). Reform Ideas that Travel Far Afield: The Two Cultures of Reform in New York City's District #2 and San Diego. *Journal of Educational Change* 5 (2): 161-197.

Stein, Sandra J. & Liz Gewirtzman, 2003 *Principal Training on the Ground: Ensuring Highly Qualified Leadership*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.

TenBerge, Yvette. 2001. San Diego High School Still Steaming Over the Loss of Alfaro. La Prensa May 18. 1-3. http://www.laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/may18/alfaro.htm

Wall Street Journal. 2002. San Diego Charger: Think of Alan Bersin as Giuliani West. May 6.

Warren, John. 2001. "What Price For Our Children?" Voice & Viewpoint. Nov. 8.

Wenger, Etienne. 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yonezawa, S., Jones, M., and Mehan H. 2002. Partners for Preparation: Constructing and Distributing Social and Cultural Capital to Achieve Diversity. In: W. G. Tierney & L. S. Hagedorn (Eds.) *Extending Outreach: Strategies for Accessing College*. Albany NY: SUNY

---

[1] " John and Frances get so outrageous that they upset the rest of the board members including me. . . The only idea I have is to shoot the both of them. I was thinking of a way to get them both with one bullet..."! (Munoz, 2001: 1).

[2] Change can be difficult. We also know good often accompanies change, and I believe as we move forward with our work on improving student achievement, it is time for change in the leadership of the Institute for Learning. The design genius embodied in the *Blueprint* is recognized throughout the country, thanks to Chancellor of Instruction Tony Alvarado. His work has rightfully earned the praise of all, even his adversaries, who have never taken issue with the point of the *Blueprint*, but rather with its implementation. Over time, his immense contributions to the children of San Diego and to our school community will become even more apparent. We have heard from principals and teachers that the *Blueprint* is good for children, but they need to have more discretion on how to implement it and how to make it work for the children in your school. We believe it is with the implementation of the Blueprint that we must strive to improve ourselves. While we can certainly credit Chancellor Alvarado as the architect of the *Blueprint*, it is our principals and teachers who are responsible for its continued successful implementation. It is on that note I share with you what I shared with principals today at their monthly instructional conference; I will be going before the Board of Education next Tuesday December 10, to ask for permission to renegotiate the contract of our Chancellor of Instruction, Anthony Alvarado. We will evaluate both the scope of his responsibilities and the nature of his contract with the district. This will result in a proposal to be brought before the board in the first quarter of 2003 as we discuss with him a continued relationship with the district on terms that benefit all of us. As we continue down the path of improving student achievement, I ask that you support Mary Hopper and our instructional leaders who will lead this effort at the side of principals, along with their faculties. There will be more discussion, but I wanted to share this with you as we bring it forward for the Board's consideration and as it continues to become public knowledge in the San Diego community.

For our students, Alan D. Bersin

[3] Not all high schools were involved in this process. La Jolla and Hoover which had been previously designated 'pilots' and Preuss and High Tech High which are charter schools are exempt from this effort, which is another indication of the differentiated approach to high school reform.