People Matters: Innovations in Institutionally Weak Contexts

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4.1 Change and Innovation: Contested Conceptions

Reforms are an ever-present part of educational policy across the world (Cuban 1990). Yet even in this ever turbulent context, the 1980s stand out in terms of massive government and public disillusionment with education in various parts of the world. *Nation at Risk* report of 1983 in the USA as well as *Education Reform Act* of 1988 in the UK are but a few examples of an overall criticism of schools' capacity to provide better lives for their graduates, which spread over English-speaking countries at the time in the 1990s; these debates, together with the growing influence of international organizations including World Bank (Heyneman 2003), delineated a whole stream of research literature, including Fullan's influential works on educational change (Fullan 1999, 2001). Fullan embraced the reform process in education as a policy or a set of policies that follow orderly stages from initiation to implementation and, later on, institutionalization (2001). What this conception apparently requires is an implied bedrock of common ideas and norms, as well as a shared knowledge of basic rules of social interactions, i.e., social institutions (Waks 2007, p. 285). Fundamental changes would not have been ever possible had they not been preceded or reinforced by the transformation of values. For this transformation to occur, a public arena, where various arguments might circulate, has to be in place since a commonality of norms or their difference reveals itself through open debate. Those arguments are usually accumulated by collective entities standing for a group of individuals sharing a common national, professional, or class identity. A network of collective stakeholders makes public debate possible and even inevitable. Yet we have to admit that connection of institutions and civic organization is not an inherent product of human history. Shared norms

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might be acquired and actually are acquired by various means. Henceforth I use the term "institution" to refer to a particular body of shared norms, rules, and viewpoints that arise from a variety of contexts. I use the term *institutionally weak context* to refer to such context where the existence of institutions is a subject of suspension or outright neglect. Under such circumstances no fundamental change in Waks's terms could happen since there is no any common set of norms shared across society to benchmark transformation. Moreover, it is precisely this subversion of common norms and ideals which was most eagerly sought after by the citizens of the late USSR. Paradoxically, the outburst of political activity during Perestroika entailed unforeseen decline of civic bonds with almost no nongovernmental organization (NGO) to stand up alongside the state in the public eye. In the field of educational policy campaigning for "humanization," which presumed respectfulness toward students' personality, rapidly swept the pendulum of reform too far away from "a common sense of citizenship" (World Bank 1995, p. xv). Although the obvious demise of public and political spheres after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the weakness of civic institutions was very much a product of radical individualism that flourished during and after Perestroika (Prozorov 2009). Social activities evolved around a highly selective process of creating one's own private public out of small number of entrusted friends that took shape already in 1970s (Yurchak 2006) and survived easily after the collapse of the USSR. The Soviet pedagogical Innovation Movement represented one of the clearest instances of this privatization of public sphere. The merging of pedagogical innovations with active promotion of such privatized publicity has had dramatic effect on the movement's sustainability, diminishing its capacity to bring systemic change into the secondary education in post-Soviet Russia. Our theoretical question is whether subjective implications of innovative processes largely dominated their diffusion within the institutionally weak context of late Soviet socialism and the new Russia of 1990s and why that happened. This *subjectification* of innovations was first detected through close reading of research philosophical and/or (auto)biographical accounts produced by members of the Innovation Movement of the time and afterward (Kasprzhak 1992; Schedrovitsky 1993; Dneprov 2006, p. 79; Nemtsev 2006; Pinsky 2007, p. 139). Since all of them unanimously emphasized paramount importance of freedom as a primary condition of pedagogical innovation, the task of my own research was to pinpoint this constellation against the background of a comparative historical account of the two superpowers' educational innovation policies after 1945 and analyze interviews with the former members of innovative movement, periodicals, and archival materials.

4.2 Mining Meanings: A Note on Method

It might be reasonably argued whether retrospective accounts of the past could stand as actual facts referencing real events. A step into the controversial arena of meanings implies the researcher's involvement in intensive conversations with witnesses of events researched. The other person could not be dismissed as a

mere informant but rather insinuated as a collaborator or a field counterpart (Kvale 1996). That said we aspire to generalization of the contents of interviews in order to represent the discursive landscape as a whole (Silverman 2013; Yin 2009). For such a generalization to be possible, the researcher has to open up at first to the colloquial contingences or even direct attempts to impact his or her assumptions and conclusions. There is a certain challenge to accepted research conventions when interview is de-instrumentalized and turned into a field of outright improvisation (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Yet it seems that this improvisational character of interviews was perfectly suited to the unveiling of human attitudes in all their complexity. Past and present are not poles apart, their boundary being constantly shifted through discursive interventions (Brown 2006). The generalizations produced should not, of course, be treated as one-size-fits-all statements on the essence of innovations as such. Their validity is bound to a certain temporal and spatial context and is assessed against the background of data retrieved from archival search as well as close examination of periodicals and other sources. From January 2015 to April 2016, 37 in-depth semi-structured interviews of approximately an hour and a half length each were conducted by the author and graduate students Ksenia Sidorova and Artyom Kulakov to whom I am very thankful for their participation and assistance. The sample was constructed via snowball technique (Babbie 2001), starting with personal acquaintances of the author who are former members of innovative movement. We also reached a number of school teachers who were professionally active at the given period although had not been involved in any close cooperation with innovators movement. Several interviews were conducted with experts from abroad who frequently attended Russia in the late 1980s and/or 1990s as researchers and experts of international organizations. Three informants provided written answers on the questionnaire compiled by the author in line with the structure of the interview guide. All collocutors either signed an informed consent form or granted their agreement on citing their statements and names in publication via e-mail. Two interviews were conducted on Skype. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Translations from Russian are provided by the author of this paper. Following the transcription, all interviews as well as written answers were coded, and 12 most common categories were extracted to apply them in the analysis of the 1980s and 1990s periodicals, especially *Teachers Gazette*, archival materials, and other publications including research literature or pieces produced by innovators themselves.

4.3   Setting the Scene: The War Game of Innovations

The history of educational innovations from 1945 onward is abundant with controversies since the possibility of delivering some real change in practice was coupled with political climate of the Cold War. Before the late 1940s, the process of renewal in education was not treated as a rapid breakthrough reinforced by national governments. Paul R. Mort and his colleagues at Columbia University in the 1930s

and 1940s developed a sustained evolutionary account of innovations. According to Mort, innovation is a rather slow, literally decades-long process of adopting the changes in the educational system. Such process is in turn generously supported by constant increase in public expenditures per each pupil (Mort and Cornell 1938). It was a gradual *adaptation* of the older institutions or practices to emergent needs and capacities that Mort's group presented as the driver of educational transformation (Farnsworth 1940). The term "innovation" remained mostly synonymous to the adaptation although slightly favoring a specific connotation of novelty with respect to both needs and practices of educators. It is worth noting that evolutionary discourse of innovations was by definition not aimed at the immediate redesign of the process of teaching itself but rather on the extension of library services at schools, regular medical inspection of students, or special treatment for mentally retarded children (Farnsworth 1940). This evolutionist account of educational innovations was overshadowed by the Cold War. The launching of Sputnik, in particular, produced a profound shock to the American political establishment and to the American society as a whole. Although "Sputnik moment" should by no means be singled out as the only cause for changes in innovations research and politics, the shift toward an organizational perspective in American context in the 1960s was evident. Innovations were now put under the umbrella of preplanned and organized institutional efforts to transform curriculum and instruction methods (Committee for Economic Development [CED] 1968). While recognizing the importance of individualized learning, multilevel bureaucracies and business groups in the USA emphasized the role of instrumental technology and proper management in education. Dissemination of innovations got a much closer linkage with recurrent accountability for external audit as well as with technocratic ambitions of behavioral engineering (Aerospace Education Foundation [AEF] 1968). Inspired by the vision of establishing an "industrial pipeline of innovations" (Clark and Guba 1967), corporate lobby rushed to play leading part in educational policy advocating for transparency of schools in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness (CED 1968). In the early 1970s, humanistic approaches advocating for self-directed learning within a diverse, friendly environment were reinforced once again (Committee for Innovative Education of the Delaware County [CIEDC] 1971). Yet the organizational stance prevailed and even culminated in the *Nation at Risk* report in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE] 1983). Innovations also attained much closer linkage to the promotion of individual and collective entrepreneurship.

At that very moment, another nation which presumed success in educational policy once animated America's strive for innovation in education, the USSR, was headed for the last educational reform in its history (O reforme 1984). The rhetoric of party officials propagating reform was all about the improvement of teacher's standing in society, greater respect, and financial provisions for teaching profession. In contrast with America, little if anything was said on the accountability of schools and teaching staff. The lack of proper data made almost impossible for educational institutions to benchmark across the country let alone to carry out cross-national comparisons (World Bank 1995). Despite the launch of new educational reforms in

1984, Soviet officials believed that the educational system, as a whole, was on the right track and sketched long-term plans for improvement of the existing system by 2000 (O reforme 1984). Although the political climate in general grew milder after Michael Gorbachev came to power in 1985, Soviet schools and educators in general remained loyal to the ruling party and its communist ideology. The decisive breakthrough arrived in late October in 1986 with the publication of the *Manifesto of the Cooperative Pedagogy* in professional newspaper *Teachers Gazette* (Lysenkova et al. 1986). It was this newspaper and its editor in chief, Vladimir Matveev, who started to organize teachers' activities across the USSR, which were based on the Manifesto. Matveev's *Teachers Gazette* (*Uchitel'skaia gazeta*) succeeded in establishing a substitute for a public sphere to discuss pressing issues facing the teaching profession. Yet, as party ideological control was still in effect, discussion of school management and strategic goals was hardly possible. *Teachers Gazette* was instrumental in promoting national exposure for so-called novators (*Novatory*), a group of teachers who were especially successful in (re)inventing and applying allegedly innovative tools for class instruction. The *Teachers Gazette* and its editorial staff were harshly criticized by representatives of Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (APS) for their "amateur" and "un-comprehensive" approach to the delicate issues of pedagogical experimentation (Likhachev 1987). As educational "novations" were basically promoted by means of pedagogical journalism, the movement was at first detached from scholarly expertise. TV and radio supported popularity of *Novatory* broadcasting their lessons to a broader audience. The *Novatory* themselves, as well as journalists of *Teachers Gazette*, suddenly turned into all-Soviet media stars. Although creating a certain flavor of recognition around the Innovative Movement, *Teachers Gazette* was not in position to act as a powerful sponsor of educational change in terms of official policy. For example, at the end of 1988, its editor in chief Matveev was forced to resign. At that time the pendulum implicitly swung away from practical problems of teaching to an ambitious task of shaping new national educational policy. In 1988 all educational entities in the Soviet government were merged into one State Committee of Education—a, huge super ministry with unprecedented human and material resources. The head of SCE, Gennadii Yagodin, invited ambitious historian of education, Eduard Dneprov, affiliated with APS, to chair a group of experts commissioned with the task of developing a new conception of secondary education. Dneprov was keen on not missing this opportunity.

4.4   (In)novators: Old and New

In 1990, Russia proclaimed its national sovereignty, which meant a rapid breakup of the USSR. Dneprov was elected as the first Minister of Education of barely existent new nation and presented precisely those conceptions that were elaborated 2 years before as his program, less than a year and a half after the Soviet Union collapsed. Paradoxically enough, it was around 1991 that the previously celebrated *Novatory* disappeared from public eye. What was at stake now was the overall

conception of a new school for the new democratic Russia. Since Soviet schooling stood for control and coercion, Dneprov and his coworkers opted for decentralization of educational policy, a reasonable choice, given the rapidly deteriorating state capacity and dramatic decrease of funding (World Bank 1995; Webber 2000). The overall flavor of educational policy was predominantly negative, owing to a mere opposition to everything "Soviet" from school uniform to textbooks to fixed curricula. This "big bang" strategy (Johnson 1997) produced a chaos of particles, for example, schools rotating around their own orbits. It was at that time when innovations and innovators were those ones who benefited from it most of all. There is still no sufficient evidence with regard to who was the first to label certain grassroots activities as innovations. From 1989 onward the term was given some credit (Prigozhin 1989; Yusufbekova 1991; Klarin 1994), although this strain of literature remained relatively small in comparison with publications concerning *Novatory*. The scholars who wrote on innovations at that time displayed a considerable degree of familiarity with Western literature on the subject, though with no special focus on organizational theory or transferring innovations into broader practice. It seems rather likely that innovators just borrowed the term which had been in the air for some time. While providing some linkage with already existing hype around *Novatory*, the term explicitly distanced this new wave of pedagogical movement from preceding events.

Well before Perestroika there were lots of teachers advocating for the fostering of children's creativity as a core instructional principle. Most of them were eager to share their techniques although only in a mature form, as a finished product. The efforts of separate activists were embraced as a pedagogy of cooperation (*sotrudnichestvo*), a term coined apparently by well-known pedagogical journalist, Simon Soloveichik, in 1986, which referred to a specific manner of teachers' relationship with children based on cooperation and respect. That approach stood very much in line with the overall strategic priorities of official reform, which claimed personality development to be of the highest importance (O reforme 1984). Although some prominent teachers-novators repeatedly referred to official documents as true guidelines for their practice (Bazhenova 1987), innovators moved much further in their outright criticism of Soviet schooling as such (Johnson 1997; Webber 2000). That was in fact a logical option for them since they often were not professional teachers, or at least they strived to become something more than just teachers-organizers, managers, and activists. As outsiders, with respect to both schools and scholarly establishment at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, they devised new ways to spread their ideas. *Teachers Gazette* staff member, young former science teacher Alexander Adamsky launched a network of professional exchange built around pedagogical events (*festivals*) to be held in different regions of the country. The very name of this network, Eureka, referred to the joyous feeling of finding new ways to do things professionally. The movement culminated with the attempt to create an All-Soviet Union of Creative Teachers in 1990. With the collapse of the USSR, innovators rushed into the new era willing to destroy each and every remnant of the Soviet school (Webber 2000). Yet, since its inception in 1991, no new ideas or figures came out of this Innovation Movement. Without

access to electronic means of communication, particular innovators had to act completely on their own, facing the need either to establish some tactical coalitions with their local surroundings or to appeal directly to some independent sponsors mainly from abroad. In fact, it was the Soros foundation that, in 1993–1995, supported 100 "innovative" schools across the country, chosen through a murky process of expert surveys (Latsis 1995). Around 1994 the Association of Innovative Schools and Centers was founded (Dneprov et al. 1997).

As early as in 1995, Association's first president, a headmaster of a renowned Moscow school № 731, Alexander Tubel'sky, was convinced that the Innovation Movement had already been "dying" (Kerr 1995). By 1998 the Association seemingly ceased any activities after publishing a comprehensive volume representing innovators in their own words a year before (Dneprov et al. 1997). By 2000 it became obvious that the greatest part of schools in the new Russia remained unchanged, with management and staff hostile to the very word "innovation" and the prospects for further development rather unclear (Webber 2000). Russian educational policies after 2000 already received some coverage in the research literature (Dneprov 2006; Gounko and Smale 2007; Silova 2010; Luk'yanova 2012), but those accounts are focused primarily on the growing neoliberal profile of educational policy, with its focus on accountability and quality assessment. With the World Bank's adoption of the first educational loan to Russia in 1997, international organizations benefited from much greater influence on the national agenda in educational policy (Minina 2014). Before 1997, the World Bank or other international organizations were not involved in projects directly addressing issues of educational reform in Russia (Stephen Heyneman, written answers to author's questionnaire, e-mail message, May 26, 2015), although a sizeable amount of ground reports and analytic papers were produced dating back to1993 or even earlier (Stephen Heyneman, written answers to author's questionnaire, e-mail message, May 26, 2015). The 10 years between 1986 and 1996 were seemingly the only moment when teachers and school management launched a full-blown remake of profession on their own, given the sudden absence of government control and relative detachment from the scene of rising global neoliberal educational policy. Although the factual story of those turbulent years was highlighted in a number of publications (Jones 1994; Sutherland 1999; Webber 2000), the reasons for rapid decline of the Innovative Movement are still to be unraveled in full clarity. With few international stakeholders on the scene at the time and rapidly deteriorating state capacity, it were educators themselves, their ideas and actions that either drove the change or made it a dead end.

4.5   The March of (Socialist) Innovations

In March 1987 a renowned Soviet pedagogical journalist who published extensively on education issues Simon Soloveichik came out with a cycle or articles under the general title "Ivanov's life" in the *Teachers Gazette*. Ivanov, according to Soloveichik, was among those rare scholars who truly brought Soviet pedagogical

theory into practice (Soloveichik 1987a). From the early 1960s onward, this Leningrad-based researcher developed a conception of *common creative deeds*, which was guided by the assumption that children and teenagers collectively stand out as real game changers in social reality (Dimke 2015). While explicating Ivanov's ideas, Soloveichik claimed that a child's nature is intrinsically dual so that it combines individual as such and a "tiny part of collective, nation, society" (Soloveichik 1987b, p. 4). According to Soloveichik, this duality unfolds itself in the process of upbringing, which is a combination of individual development and socialization (Soloveichik 1987b, March 28, p. 4). Henceforth, in this strain of articles, Soloveichik develops his central thesis, presenting pedagogy of cooperation as the only possible way to combine humanist and collectivist pedagogies thus establishing "truly communist relationships in the process of upbringing" (Soloveichik 1987c, April 2, p. 5). Cooperation pedagogy was introduced rather smoothly as nothing but a natural outgrowth of the whole history of Soviet school. Soloveichik's representation of *Novatory* emphasized their proximity to Ivanov's "Marxist-Leninist" beliefs since they both share the aspiration for unrestricted creativity of the youth. Quite in line with official rhetoric (O reforme 1984), cooperation pedagogy was described as a grassroots creative process "pushed forward by the will of numerous persons and collectives" (Soloveichik 1987c, April 2, p. 5). Wide circulation of mass creativity ideal in the Soviet context made it much easier to legitimize *Novatory* in the public eye blurring the boundary of political clichés and pedagogical techniques (Sigman 2014). An overall progressivist stance of Soviet ideology covered a broad array of meanings. Yet, at the same time, it undermined the possibility to define precisely what exactly was done by teachers in a newly developed manner. To an extent *Novatory* in terms of their professional performance were just as new as every Soviet teacher ever. Not surprisingly, for ordinary teachers who shied away from (In)novative Movement initiatives, the *Novatory* made no difference. Instead, despite upheavals of Perestroika, such teachers felt the "sameness" of their everyday labor, because "in our business it is teachers' creativity only that always matters" (Tatyana Emelina, interview with the author, May 19, 2015). For some teachers, discussions of *Novatory* even did not distinguish from campaigns for better in-service teacher training ignited regularly by national or local authorities (Galina Semyonova, interview with the author, April 20, 2015). In retrospect, they are sometimes prone to label all activities connected with Innovative Movement as a sheer "bureaucratic lip service" (Grigorii Mednikov, interview with Artyom Kulakov, January 6, 2016).

The role of *Teachers Gazette* in promoting innovation should by no means be underestimated. The flow of publications on *Novatory* not only expressed its importance but somehow ensured its institutionalization through multiplied monotonous repetition (Yurchak 2006). The importance of teachers' creativity was reinflated with the start of "public" discussion of the 1984 education reform. The *Teachers Gazette* campaign around experiments of *Novatory* was at first seen as a part of reform propaganda. Step by step, the staff of *Teachers Gazette* took relative control over the discussion of Innovation Movement due to the help of liberals in the party establishment (Alexander Adamsky, interview with the author, March

21, 2015). The diffusion of innovations was promulgated through constant repetition of a limited set of names and ideas from national newspapers and TV channels, pouring onto audiences that were not accustomed to the critical assessment of information. It is against this background that the stress on "teacher as journalist" (Tsirul'nikov 1987, p. 3) should be understood. Since those teachers-journalists were insiders in the apparatuses of propaganda, their ideas were easily scaled up to visibility for the whole professional community. This "omnipresence" of creativity supported the ground for temporary tactical coalitions of bureaucrats and teachers (Sigman 2014). Education went ahead of everything else:

> [t]here was a moment when we decided that education could realize itself independently of economic and social conditions. There was a moment when we decided that education could go first no matter which fiscal system you have, no matter public spending, no matter how people are living, no matter property rights. <...> No matter how public administration is arranged, whether you have elections, democracy. No matter. (Alexander Adamsky, interview with the author, March 21, 2015)

The wording used to promote those initiatives in education, including such terms as "experiment" or "experimental school," contributed to the popularity of the movement and yet highlighted detachment of its members from professional community. Since those experiments were rather explicitly mentored by academic elites and/or party and state officials (Vyatcheslav Losing, interview with the author, February 9, 2015), they were excluded from the common educational space. Teachers who worked for those experimental schools "felt like a little bit outside away from the general system" [choreography teacher, Kemerovo]. Immersed in the games of elites, the Innovative Movement was prone to manipulations which "recycled" its initial ideas in favor of local politicking. Thus, for example, the chancellor of the Siberian Krasnoyarsk University supported an experimental school affiliated with the university because of the would-be reputational benefits from such an undertaking (Boris Khasan, interview with Ksenia Sidorova, January 6, 2015). Institutional development as well as establishment of professional associations lagged way behind:

> [I] did not see this level [*as compared to the US—P.S.*] of variety and activity in the USSR. I know that there were organizations and groups, and conferences and meetings of various kinds, but there did not appear to be as many variations and (of course) none of the political activity (at least none that was visible to those looking in from outside). At the time, it seemed to me, that if one thought of the educational system as a community of living, biological organisms, this situation of lack of variety would be an indicator of problems or risks to come. (Steve Kerr, written answers to author's questionnaire, e-mail message, April 7, 2015)

The solitary position of certain educators and schools undermined the diffusion of experiments and decreased adaptability of such institutions in changing societal conditions. In fact, many innovators opted for an outright distancing from any civic activity:

[I] realized that I could only survive keeping low profile. I was not asking anybody for anything. I was not looking for any shortcuts. I was just doing my job very quietly. So no one suggested any assistance to me and yet I was pretty good with that since nobody was trying to stop me. This was so unusual and so great! (Boris Bim-Bad, interview with the author, March 17, 2015)

Apart from ideologically driven dissemination of creativity discourse, there turned out to be no other means to distinguish and detect educational innovations. It appeared suddenly that even innovators, themselves, did not treat the movement as a collective entity united by any common principles and ideas or, for that matter, expertise (Victor Bolotov, interview with the author, February 5, 2015).

4.6 Charismatic Structuring

Many educators around the world use the term "innovation" to refer to their instructional techniques or methods. Yet it was only in the Soviet context that innovations were associated with the personality of a certain educator. Many innovative experiments were adjusted to personal likes and dislikes, interests, and capacities of one charismatic person. Such person quite often had an ambition of no less than creating an "entirely new" system of instruction (Steve Kerr, written answers to author's questionnaire, e-mail message, April 7, 2015). So closely was teacher creativity connected with the actual presence of certain personality that it seemingly embodied the very sense of novelty:

[I] was preparing a science project with a class. And we were supposed to present it at school festival first and then to other schools and then on the city level. Yet that all was *only when I worked with Losing*. And all other schools... Well *I only understood what novation is when I happened to work with Losing*. And everything else was... you know...so traditional. (Svetlana Akimova, interview with Artyom Kulakov, November 20, 2015, italics added—P.S.)

Charisma, unfortunately, could not be transmitted or transferred, regardless of personal contact. This unique event was memorized rather strongly, yet it could not be communicated to anyone who had never witnessed the same charismatic person. Diffusion of innovations was bound to personal networks with no massive press coverage already and yet with no e-mail. Many innovative schools have chosen a posture of outright detachment from supposedly hostile or underdeveloped local environments (Tatyana Kovalyova, interview with the author, January 20, 2015). "Going to be something new" (Harley Balzer, interview with the author, April 8, 2015), they missed the point of innovation's transmission to secondary education. In contrast with declarations (or aspirations) of some prominent innovators (Kasprzhak 1992), secondary education was not destroyed; it just was out of their sight. The fragmentation of the system of schooling increased dramatically after 1991. Originating entirely from state-funded planned-out educational system, most innovators were unaware of specific issues of financial management. In fact they just could not imagine what schools' financial autonomy might look like and preferred to demand extra

funding from the state, which only deepened the rupture of mass and elite "innovative" secondary education [Interview with Natalia Tipenko]. Even economists at the end of the 1980s took for granted the existence of a redistributive socialist economy supported by centralized planning and local industrial facilities (Saburov et al. 1988). Dissemination of newly emerged "experiments" was downsized to personal communications with colleagues and government officials. Personal relationships were used as leverage to demand preferences, for example, through weaker control and greater financial support (Natalia Tipenko, interview with the author, January 26, 2015). Without valid, national educational statistics (World Bank 1995), it was almost impossible to make any solid conclusions about relative success of different "experimental" schools. The striving for novelty, prone to equating innovation and reform (Harley Balzer, interview with the author, April 8, 2015), subverted systemic change in favor of supporting the "best," yet their presumed paramount quality was quite often evidenced by nothing else than mere expert opinions obtained from professionals from nominated schools (Latsis 1995). In a way, the whole issue of institutional development, in the case of innovators, turned out to be the development of their bargaining power. Informal communication prevailed, with a negative impact on the overall institutional culture since the value of networking dominated national policy issues slanted according to personal ties. Although heavily dependent on networks of patronage and loyalty, innovators still envisioned themselves as "authors," namely, as creators of brand new philosophical or scholarly accounts (Tatyana Kovalyova, interview with the author, January 20, 2015). The term "authored school" was coined to refer to schools created by innovators from anew as works of art or scientific inventions. This term was widely used in the 1990s and afterward to pinpoint innovative institutions (Dneprov et al. 1997). Mostly detached from their environments, these "author schools" usually turned to be enclaves of charismatic leadership.

The idea of sustained subjective identity is built upon a strong sense of belonging to some meaningful community. A Soviet socialist order provided a universal example of that kind of unity in the USSR. Therefore, those Soviet citizens who strived to position themselves out of that seemingly universal frame had to invent their "private" collectivity as an alternative to the Soviet project. This primarily negative anti-Soviet identification rotated around socializing in a circle of close friends, which was extremely important for innovators just as much as for any other citizen of the late USSR (Yurchak 2006). A free individual was not supposed to act as a citizen since the public sphere was so heavily dominated by Soviet ideology. Instead they were supposed to be reliable persons, trustworthy comrades—i.e., friends. So solid seemed the framework of socialist order that the very possibility of its absolute destruction was merely unthinkable. At the same time, it was Soviet ideology or more precisely its institutional framework that maintained social bonds. Apart from those bonds, no forms of independent civic self-organization were in place to step into the public arena after rapid dissolution of the Soviet regime. It was party-controlled press and TV, party, and state officials who effectively backed the rise of pedagogical movement. In absence of this neglected infrastructure innovative movement turned to be what it was initially—a circle of friends.

4.7   Conclusion: Solitary Innovations

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a shock not only economically but institutionally. From 1985 onward till 1991, the central government played a decisive role in education reform. After 1991, education was not a priority anymore; most schools had to survive on their own, though it was not a linear transformation by any standards. Since innovation is now a buzzword for educators all over the world, this field is rather controversial. Much of this controversy was entailed by the uncritical use of some core assumptions. By far the most influential theory, Roger's (2003) conception of the innovation diffusion, is heavily framed with the linear understanding of the whole diffusion process. Other popular approaches to innovations studies share a similar linear frame (Christensen 1997; Fenn and Raskino 2008). Diffusion of innovations is represented as a gradual succession of stages, one following one another. Once an innovative idea becomes a product (a material object or technology) in the course of this process, it gets alienated from creator. It is presumed that innovation has to be able to exist independently of inventor's control. Things developed in completely opposite direction in case of Soviet innovative movement. The more visibility it acquired in the public eye or in the eye of international sponsors or experts, the more heavily it was relying on a few charismatic leaders. State failure reinforced the process of *subjectification*: making change downsized from national level to the level of particular persons reinventing themselves from the scratch. Yet the very sense of *Sovietness* remained as unquestioned as it was before 1991. Soviet superpower was dismantled too rapidly to spare any time to reflect. The feeling of perplexity had driven the pendulum to the complete rejection of the Soviet tradition of schooling (Webber 2000). Soviet schooling, as such, was alleged to be "out of commission" (Kasprzhak 1992), yet the pedagogical staff, the system of in-service teachers' training, and the physical environments of schools remained the same. As early as in 1995, international experts warned that no educational system could exist without translating some "common sense of citizenship" (World Bank 1995, p. 38). That common sense was so far obfuscated by impertinent struggle for personal emancipation from the bygone Soviet leviathan. Therefore, educational reform as a concerted set of institutional efforts apparently stopped soon after the dissolution of the USSR (Polyzoi and Dneprov 2010).

In contrast to Fullan's (2001) conception, initiation and implementation of innovations do happen together sometimes. To initiate the transformation of one's own consciousness is to implement new ways of thinking. Perhaps, that is the only way for innovations when a familiar social order falls apart. People need time to realize how deep the unpredicted and abrupt change would be. They need time for *osoznaniye (*Harley Balzer, interview with the author, April 8, 2015), i.e., to confront the challenge and to think it over. Innovation could manifest itself as a change of mindset if not of institutions. Moreover, subjectification of innovations as a meaningful part of an individual's experience might be necessary for the proper support of institutional innovation campaigns later on. Outer institutional dimensions of innovative processes and the inner experience of emancipation and

creativity are not two poles apart; the history of Russian innovative movement provides a clear evidence of what might happen when only "subjective" part of innovations is at stake while the complexities of making new structures of decision-making are neglected. Though the context was favorable to grassroots initiatives before 1997–1999, no system of institutional incentives was established; neither were there channels of diffusion set in motion. Instead, choices made primarily protected the authenticity of one's brand of "authored school" at the expense of diffusion. That excessive personal branding was detrimental for subsequent perception of innovations in professional teacher communities in Russia. Solitary innovations of *authored schools* in turn took defensive attitude to their presumably hostile environments. There is of course no such thing as one-size-fits-all model of innovative development. In studying the case of the Russian innovative movement of the 1980s and especially 1990s, we do not see a coherent set of policies designed and/or enforced by government. Does a personal change, no matter how profound, deserve the name of innovation at all? It is tempting to dismiss this whole story as irrelevant to the proper study of educational innovations. Some change in Russian education had obviously happened after 1991. Yet it was primarily a transformation in the self-understanding of certain educators. The unexpected triumph of subjectivity decoupled innovations as personal emancipation from civic actions seeking to re-create the founding principles of educational system as a whole. Ironically enough, institutional infrastructure for innovations was maintained by totalitarian state only. The massive decline of state's capacity to pick and choose and promote certain innovations had a detrimental effect on the prospects of Russian innovative movement in absence of any other independent stakeholders to set the track of reform. Yet the government's comeback on the scene of educational policy after 2000 has not produced an influx of grassroots innovations, as compared with the late 1980s. Apparently both the government and professional and civic networks together are needed to sustain an innovation. How shall we inhabit institutions with grassroots initiatives? How shall we reconnect the state and the people in a way that would effectively deliver educational innovations? These questions are now pressing for educational policy professionals in Russia, just as they are so for their colleagues across the world.

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