

# *(In)Fidelity: What the Resistance of New Teachers Reveals about Professional Principles and Prescriptive Educational Policies*

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*In this article, Betty Achinstein and Rodney Ogawa examine the experiences of two new teachers who resisted mandated “fidelity” to Open Court literacy instruction in California. These two case studies challenge the portrayal of teacher resistance as driven by psychological deficiency and propose instead that teachers engage in “principled resistance” informed by professional principles. They document that within prescriptive instructional programs and control-oriented educational policies, teachers have a limited ability to implement professional principles, including diversified instruction, high expectations, and creativity. In this environment, teachers who resist experience professional isolation and schools experience teacher attrition. Through these two cases, Achinstein and Ogawa express concern about the negative impact of educational reforms that are guided by technical and moralistic control.*

We teach kids to be confident, to stand up for themselves, to have opinions, to be strong, and to be wise. When teachers are that way, they are shut down. We don't want that in our teachers.  
—Sue, a new teacher

As this new teacher suggests, the capacity to “stand up for themselves” that many teachers foster in their students may be stifled in teachers by educational policies and programs that aim to control and thereby limit debate on instructional practice. This article highlights the cases of two novice teachers who engaged in resistance against a scripted literacy program that was approved by the state and adopted by their school districts. The cases reveal that

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these teachers' resistance was rooted in professional principles and, in at least one case, was initially supported by a professional community. The cases challenge the dominant images of teacher resistance as personality flaws and conservative acts needing to be altered.

These cases also reveal the unintended consequences of prescriptive instructional programs and control-oriented educational policies. Our purpose was not to assess the efficacy and appropriateness of different approaches to literacy instruction. Instead, we focused on how districts enforce the current policy environment by demanding that teachers implement literacy programs with "fidelity," thus establishing a technical and moralistic tone that constrains reflective critique and marginalizes dissent in the profession.

### Related Literature

Teacher resistance has not gained substantial attention from researchers, despite research that documents instances where teachers rejected policy directives (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Cohen, 1991; Cuban, 1993). It has become a timely issue because current policies in the United States limit teacher autonomy by setting curriculum standards, establishing accountability systems, and prescribing instructional methods (Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores, & Scribner, 2003; Rowan & Miskel, 1999).

Advocates for instructional policies that specify standards, curriculum, and pedagogy argue that such policies provide teachers with greater certainty about what and how to teach (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999), which raises the quality of instruction, improves student achievement, and thus promotes equity across educational settings (Slavin, 2002). They explain that these policies provide guidance to teachers in low-capital districts, which tend to employ high numbers of underqualified and inexperienced teachers and may suffer from low expectations and high turnover among both teachers and students. Moreover, some analysts posit that when academic standards and accountability provisions are well developed and implemented systemwide, they can lead to greater coherence and more challenging curricula, build collaboration among teachers, raise the quality of teaching, and focus attention on improving achievement (Gandal & Vranek, 2001; Smith & O'Day, 1991).

Critics counter that these policies can have deleterious effects, that they narrow teacher discretion, discourage effective instruction, and focus on lower-order learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997; McDonald, 1992; McNeil, 2000). Opponents explain that such policies can also limit inquiry-oriented, teacher-learning opportunities that build a flexible, professional knowledge base on which teachers rely to inform practice in complex and dynamic settings (Berliner, 1992; Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999; Shulman, 1987; Sykes, 1999). Finally, control-oriented instructional policies can deprofessionalize the field (Apple, 1995; McNeil, 2000) because they conflict with the conception of teachers as professionals who possess a specialized knowl-

edge base, employ repertoires of instructional strategies to respond to classroom complexities, are reflective, and participate in communities of practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Schön, 1983; Shulman, 1987).

Research has typically reduced teacher resistance to a psychological deficit in the “resistor,” who is characterized as being unwilling to change (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995; Moore, Goodson, & Hargreaves, in press) and resisting policies and programs that attempt to improve education by controlling their instructional practices (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Cohen, 1991; Cuban, 1993; Huberman, 1973). However, an emerging body of research reveals a different view, where resistance is characterized as “good sense” in the current instructional climate (see Bushnell, 2003; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995; Moore et al., in press), revealing the tension between organizational control and professional autonomy.

This study contributes to the growing body of work on teacher resistance in three ways that we highlight below, along with working definitions of concepts that emerged from this study. First, the resistance of *new teachers* provides an extreme example of teacher resistance because novices are especially prone to adopting instructional “logics” embedded in state instructional policies (Coburn, 2001) and enacting practices that reflect their districts’ approaches to instruction (Grossman, Thompson, & Valencia, 2002). They are also extremely vulnerable because they can be released without cause, and might be expected to have only tentative commitments to professional principles. Professional principles are conceptions about teaching and professionalism in which teachers view themselves as professionals with specialized expertise, who have discretion to employ repertoires of instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of diverse students, hold high expectations for themselves and students, foster learning communities among students, and participate in self-critical communities of practice.<sup>1</sup> Second, the cases provide instances of *principled resistance*, which involves overt or covert acts that reject instructional policies, programs, or other efforts to control teachers’ work that undermine or contradict professional principles. Third, unlike previous work, this article focuses on how *the system’s stance of fidelity to program implementation and response to dissent* expose a technical and moralistic policy environment that quells professional discourse. “Fidelity” is a term that was used by administrators and teachers in the study to describe strict adherence to the text, pacing guides, and teacher scripts associated with the programs adopted by the state and district. By technical policy environment, we refer to the mechanisms of control that regulate the rules about work at its technical core (e.g., mandates that script both content and pedagogy and are coupled with accountability sanctions). A moralistic policy environment refers to compliance with institutional norms and values through ideological means that determine what is and is not allowable in a given system, and thus serves to legitimize the system.

## The Study

### *Background*

This study stems from a program of research at The New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, that examines the induction experiences of twenty novice elementary school teachers in California. Nine of these teachers were selected to participate in a study that focused on the influence of school and district organization, as reflected in literacy programs, on their professional socialization. Thus, we did not set out to document cases of teacher resistance. However, as two cases of teacher resistance emerged from our data, we were compelled to examine them.

### *Research Design and Methods*

The design of the present study reflects the larger study's focus on the influence of organizational context on teacher socialization (see Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglmán, 2004). We chose a comparative, purposive case study design to explore the socialization of teachers in different contexts (Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989). We selected five districts with contrasting approaches to literacy instruction (different programs and levels of curricular control). The study incorporated mixed methods and a multilevel design (nine novices situated in seven schools, five districts, and one state). Although case study findings are not generalizable, they provide opportunities to generate hypotheses and build theories about relationships that may otherwise remain hidden (Hartley, 1994; Yin, 1989).

We selected two teachers from the sample of nine teachers in the larger project because the two were exceptions. Unlike their peers, who tended to comply with their schools' and districts' instructional policies and programs (see Achinstein et al., 2004), they publicly challenged the literacy programs adopted by their districts.

The two teachers worked in schools and districts that shared two important conditions. First, they adopted the same literacy program, which study participants in both sites characterized as "highly prescriptive." Second, although the two schools differed substantially in their rankings in the state's accountability system, both acutely felt the pressure of that accountability program. As Table 1 demonstrates, the demographic characteristics of students differed between the two sites. While both sites had significant percentages of students receiving free/reduced-price lunches and from ethnic/racial minority backgrounds, much higher proportions of students in Site B (at both district and school levels) received free/reduced-price lunches, were from ethnic/racial minority backgrounds, and were English-language learners (ELLs).

We employed the following data sources in the larger study of nine new teachers: audiotapes of semistructured interviews, videotapes of classroom observations, audiotapes of mentoring conferences, a new teacher survey, and other documents. In the study reported here, we interviewed each of the two

TABLE 1 *Demographics of Two Focal Cases*

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<i>Site A</i>	<i>Site B</i>
<i>Arrington District</i> : 2,800 students K–8 Free/reduced-price lunch: 31% Minority: 61% Latino, Asian, African American	<i>Bayside District</i> : 5,168 students K–8 Free/reduced-price lunch: 70% Minority: 98% Latino, African American, Pacific Islander
<i>Franklin School</i> : 473 students K–6 Free/reduced-price lunch: 49% Minority: 70% English-language learners: 17% 2003 API: rank 7 (1=low; 10=high)	<i>Hoover School</i> : 580 students 4–8 Free/reduced-price lunch: 79% Minority: 99% English-language learners: 78% 2003 API: rank 1 (1=low; 10=high)
<i>Sue’s Class</i> : Grade 5–6 combination class White, Latino, Asian	<i>Rob’s Class</i> : Grade 5 Latino, African American

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new teachers on four occasions for forty-five to ninety minutes, and two more times for briefer twenty-minute “check-in” interviews. We interviewed their mentors on three occasions for forty to ninety minutes, and conducted briefer check-ins on two occasions. At each school, we interviewed the principal, other new teachers, and other colleagues. At the district level, we interviewed a superintendent or assistant superintendents/directors of curriculum and instruction. The twenty-seven interviews in the two cases addressed respondents’ backgrounds, beliefs, and practices about teaching literacy, school and district context, influences on literacy practice, and new teacher socialization experiences (see Achinstein et al., 2004, for protocols).

We videotaped each of the two teachers while they were teaching literacy lessons on six occasions for a total of eighteen hours. We audiotaped conferences between the novices and their mentors over the course of the year (a total of sixteen one-hour conferences). We disseminated new teacher surveys in the districts that included questions about literacy programs, beliefs and practices regarding literacy instruction, and new teacher background. We collected other documents, including school and district report cards, and state instructional and accountability policies.

We initially coded interviews using themes derived from the literature on teacher socialization and those generated from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We coded for socialization factors, including teacher background and beliefs, school context, district context, and state policy. We also coded for the following: beliefs about students, teaching, learning, literacy, and professionalism; resistance (conflicts, political negotiations, individual experiences); and classroom practice. Mentoring conferences were analyzed for topics of

conversation; beliefs and practices about literacy instruction; and new teacher negotiations with organizational contexts, colleagues, and administrators. Documents were analyzed for messages about literacy instruction, level of organizational control, and teacher autonomy.

Two researchers analyzed the videotapes of classroom practice, selectively scripting dialogue and writing vignettes about practice. The researchers analyzed the videos for literacy content, pedagogical approaches, materials, alignment of practice with teacher beliefs (as expressed in interviews), alignment of practice with the school and district program, and student engagement. Descriptive statistics were developed from survey data, and results were disaggregated by district and school.

To compile the two cases and identify emergent themes, we used the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to generate, revise, and regenerate categories and codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We wrote descriptive case memos for both teachers and their districts and schools, including representative vignettes from their classroom practice and representative examples from interviews and documents. From these cases, we identified emergent themes about the nature of teacher resistance, professional principles, and system responses. We conducted a cross-case analysis, employing matrices and other displays to condense data and identify similarities and differences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, we conducted member checks by sharing memos and hypotheses with key participants and incorporating feedback in revised findings (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### *Study Context: State Instructional Policy Environment*

California is an important site for this study for two reasons. First, the state has been the center of controversy over instructional policy, including dramatic shifts in literacy instruction policies referred to as the reading wars (Lemann, 1997; Pearson, 2004). The politicized nature of such debates provides fertile ground for understanding resistance. Second, California's size, visibility, challenging student population, and active educational agenda make it a site that both represents and at times influences policies on key educational issues, thus shedding light on larger trends for policy and the profession.

In 1999, California adopted the Public Schools Accountability Act, which established a statewide assessment and accountability system. That system annually ranks schools on the Academic Performance Index (API), which is tied largely to scores on the statewide standardized achievement test and specifies sanctions for schools that chronically "underperform." The state also enacted the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program, which underwrites underperforming schools' efforts to assess their conditions and develop improvement plans.

Beginning in the late 1990s, California adopted educational policies that define content standards, align curriculum with standards, and regulate textbook adoption. The impact of these measures differed across districts and

schools, depending on their student populations. Schools serving higher percentages of students from low-income and minority backgrounds tended to adopt more prescriptive programs that emphasized direct instruction (Achinstein et al., 2004). In 1997 the state adopted the English-Language Arts Content Standards and, in 1998, it adopted the Reading/Language Arts Framework (California Department of Education, 1999).

In 2002, the state further defined literacy instruction by endorsing only two reading programs for elementary schools, one of which was the Open Court program, and offered financial incentives for their local adoption. The Open Court program was characterized by participants in this study as “highly prescriptive” because it employs the following to control teacher practice: ten teacher guides per set, which provide instructional scripts for teachers; pacing guidelines; and an emphasis on teacher-directed instruction and phonics-based learning.

### Case Study One: Sue<sup>2</sup>

Sue, a White woman in her twenties, always knew she would become a teacher because she came from a long line of teachers, including her mother and a grandmother who started one of the first kindergartens in her home state. While she described having an immediate love of school, Sue also identified her role as a critic: “I’ve definitely been a critic of teaching my whole life. Since [I was] as young as I can remember, I’ve been thinking how my teachers could’ve done things differently.”

Sue grew up in a middle-class, racially diverse community in southern California, where she attended public schools she described as “pretty traditional — nothing progressive.” She attended a prestigious public university where she majored in linguistics. Sue substitute taught in a number of private schools periodically over four years, and then attended a private university to receive her teaching credential.

Sue characterized her preservice program as “liberal, focused on multiculturalism, students of color, students’ rights, and social change.” She had a class on early literacy that was phonics based, with which she was comfortable because of her background in linguistics. Sue described her philosophy of teaching: “My philosophy had a lot to do with the individuality of the student and of the teacher. It had a lot to do with a number of things, even down to my sense of humor, a classroom where kids felt safe and secure, and high standards.”

One of Sue’s student teaching sites was in the Arrington School District. She appreciated its small size, “where you know everyone.” Sue was heavily recruited by the assistant superintendent, who had read her file. She was also pursued by her principal. In Sue’s first year, she taught a second-grade class with a high proportion of ELLs. In her second year, she was assigned a combi-

nation grade 5–6 class with a number of higher-performing students, which other teachers refused to take because it presented challenges.

### *District Context*

The district that employed Sue reflected a relatively strong control orientation in its approach to literacy instruction. This was apparent on two levels: the district's compliance with state mandates, and its emphasis on fidelity to the reading program.

The Arrington School District first adopted the Open Court reading program in 2002 (it was piloted the year before). Study participants saw the adoption of Open Court as a way to address state accountability demands. A 35-year veteran in the district explained, "I think they take accountability very seriously. . . . Adopting this extremely expensive program in a very limited funded district . . . we need to make this work. Plus, if this school district is going to survive, we've got to get our test scores higher."

The district underwent a change of leadership during the period of this study. The superintendent left unexpectedly and was replaced mid-year. The new superintendent supported the Open Court program, noting that "the state has made choices available that are very limited." He contrasted the current policy environment with what he had encountered as a new teacher in the early 1970s, when the education system was decentralized: "Thirty years later there are two state-adopted reading series. From a very wide field down to a very narrow field."

The superintendent remarked, "If there was any level of tension that I could comment on that exists here, [it] is this fact that it is very prescribed and it's very systematic. From my perspective the tension exists between teacher autonomy and program prescription." The district took a telling approach to resolving this tension: It emphasized program fidelity. The superintendent said, "We want to ensure that there has been fidelity to the program . . . so we've taken a real specific stance of expectations, that if this is where the book says that you need to be, then you need to be there." This included linking teacher evaluations to "exemplar lesson designs from the publisher, which was coming from the state," he noted.

Pam, Sue's mentor and a 35-year veteran in the district, confirmed that "our superintendent asked for a commitment by the professional staff to keep to the fidelity of the program." She recalled, "Our superintendent [said] that the district has made a commitment to — it's the new "f-word" now — fidelity to the program. Which means that teachers aren't to pick and choose what they want and do not want to teach." Thus, fidelity permeated the district: School administrators monitored teachers' adherence to pacing procedures, and district administrators conducted "walk-throughs" to assess teachers' fidelity to the program. Sue explained, "Their big catch phrase this year was fidelity. That means you follow it exactly; . . . with that came classroom visits by princi-

pals to see if your classroom was set up appropriately for Open Court. Were the right things on the wall? Were you on the right page? . . . It feels almost prison-like.”

Data from a districtwide survey of new teachers reflect the school’s strong emphasis on fidelity, even when it was at odds with teachers’ beliefs. Two-thirds of the novices responded that “my practice closely follows the methods of my school’s literacy program” (68% strongly agree-agree), while just one-third reported that their own beliefs about teaching literacy corresponded with their school’s literacy program (36% agree). Correspondingly, just one-fifth of the novices agreed that “my school culture supports me to experiment with many different approaches to literacy instruction” (21% strongly agree-agree) ( $n=19$ ).<sup>3</sup>

### *School Context*

Instructional control was also emphasized in Sue’s school, Franklin Elementary (K–6), which enrolled 473 students, with 49 percent receiving free/reduced-price lunches and 70 percent coming from minority backgrounds. Franklin serves one of the lowest-income neighborhoods in the district. The principal, Lynn, explained that testing and accountability “have a huge impact on the school. Number one, it’s a Title I school and those test scores are going to influence whether or not we become a program improvement school.”

Lynn was committed to Open Court. She noted its alignment with the broader policy context: “Our program fits perfectly with the state and district.” Lynn advocated for the adoption of Open Court because she saw it as a way to improve test scores: “I felt strongly that that would be a good move for our school because I reviewed the data and it was very clear that we didn’t have a solid phonics foundation. . . . With a population of so many ELLs, we really needed a heavy emphasis on vocabulary.”

The principal also highlighted the importance of fidelity: “So the emphasis this year has been on implementing the program with fidelity. There’s been lots of support around that. The support can also feel stressful, because of pacing guides in the district.” Like the superintendent, Lynn recognized the tension that fidelity presented for some teachers: “Some teachers who were in the independent contractor model probably find that more stressful.”

Professional development activities at Franklin focused on Open Court. Consultants from the publisher of Open Court worked with teachers on grade-level strategies, routines, and pacing. They visited classrooms to observe teachers. Thursday afternoons were set aside for teachers to collaborate in grade-level planning. According to a veteran teacher, “It was all Open Court training pretty much. It’s like I sleep, breathe, and dream Open Court.”

Franklin’s staff included twenty-three teachers; three were in either their first or second year. Despite having regularly scheduled grade-level meetings, new teachers felt isolated. A 35-year veteran and mentor of novices reported, “The three new teachers I have, I hear the same thing. They really want more

people to collaborate with, they can't find those people at the building, there is nobody on your grade level [with whom] to collaborate, plan a unit, or share materials." As we will describe later, Sue shared this acute sense of isolation.

### *A New Teacher's Experiences*

Sue resisted using the prescriptive reading program and the district's emphasis on fidelity. Her resistance was based on professional principles, which emphasize individuality and creativity, high expectations, and community-building. For Sue, these principles applied equally to students and teachers and found expression in both her talk and her instructional practice. Sue's attempts to resist the literacy program were also deeply colored by her sense of isolation and lack of support.

#### —Professional Principles

Sue valued individuality for both students and teachers. Her commitment to students' individuality was reflected in the close attention she paid to her students' needs, which contributed to her resisting Open Court. In her second year, Sue was assigned a combination grade 5–6 class with several students she and other colleagues identified as "independent learners." The twenty-seven fifth- and sixth-grade students included twelve Whites, ten Latinos, and five Asian Americans. Sue noted that some of her students were the children of parents who were officers in the school's Parent Teacher Association.

Sue was expected to teach both fifth- and sixth-grade Open Court curricula, maintaining program fidelity. However, she found that Open Court was not appropriate for her students. Sue explained, "Open Court isn't helping me to address their needs as much as [literature circle and novel study] are. Open Court is not building their sense of further confidence in reading like [novel study] will." So, over time, Sue used less and less of the Open Court curriculum, squeezing it into fewer days of the week. She created a literature-based program that involved novel study and discussions among students. She explained her strategies to her mentor: "I'm planning to not have novels go away, because they can handle [them]. Not every class can, but they can. I just can't watch them be bored." Sue's mentor, Pam, while a strong supporter of Open Court, recognized that Sue did not find it appropriate for her students: "What I've heard [is] . . . that [Open Court] doesn't feel challenging enough for the brighter or gifted students, and that may be a legitimate complaint."

Sue also applied the principle of individuality to teachers, which strengthened her resistance to the district's literacy program. She expressed great concern that Open Court and the emphasis on fidelity undermined teachers' individuality: "You don't walk into classrooms and get a sense of, '*there's that teacher's classroom.*' Our classrooms all look the same . . . you have to post certain things that go with Open Court. You have to have your desks arranged in an Open Court-suggested desk arrangement." She was concerned about hav-

ing “fidelity to the program, which means you follow it exactly and don’t add in your creativity. . . . I’m watching these teachers kind of shrivel.”

Sue also resisted Open Court on more general terms, based on principles of community, high expectations, and individuality and creativity. In teaching literacy, Sue’s high expectations were reflected in her desire to have students experience real literature by reading whole novels. She fostered community by having students discuss readings in groups, where they played roles and engaged in student-to-student dialogue. In addition, Sue supported individuality by using differentiated instruction, encouraging students to develop a “voice” in their writing, and having students experience creativity in the classroom. These qualities were evident in Sue’s use of literature circles, which is reflected in the following classroom observation. Having completed an Open Court unit, Sue deviated from the prescribed curriculum and pulled her sixth graders into a circle as part of their novel studies. There were two groups: One was reading *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (Konigsberg, 1977); the other was reading *A Wrinkle in Time* (L’Engle, 1962). Sue asked students to write about the novels and then to share their responses. In providing directions, Sue emphasized that there were no “right answers,” and in reacting to the students’ responses, she encouraged them to push their thoughts further and to look for new themes. Sue’s mentor debriefed her after this lesson: “It was absolutely brilliant. I loved every minute of it. I loved your literature circles, and it sounded to me as if you even had two groups going in the literature circle, with two different books. I think that’s great, and it goes by their ability grouping.”

Sue’s high expectations and their influence on student performance were evident in her description of a districtwide meeting with other fifth-grade teachers. During the meeting, the teachers shared their students’ autobiographical writing. While other teachers’ students wrote four paragraphs, Sue’s students wrote fifteen pages. Here again, Sue’s principles led her to resist and, in this instance, exceed district standards:

Everybody was talking about autobiographies. . . . I just realized that . . . my expectations are higher than what the other fifth grades are doing. . . . They said, “[Sue], well, how are yours going?” And I said, “I’m a little embarrassed to say this. . . . Maybe I asked for too much, but my kids just finished writing a four paragraph essay last year. So they’ve got fifteen or so pages.”

Sue’s commitment to fostering a sense of individuality in her students led her to resist, and thus exceed, the district’s writing curriculum by targeting two goals. First, she focused on helping students develop a “voice” as writers: “I think that my kids have this great voice to them, which is what I talk to them about. I hope that that’s why they find it.” Second, she actively encouraged her students’ creativity. She issued a “poetic license” to each of her students. She explained that the licenses were “like an identification card that has a little

picture of them . . . it says . . . ‘This license entitles the bearer to write as freely and creatively as she or he wants.’”

Sue’s approach as a professional was rooted in the same principles she applied to her students, namely, high expectations and creativity. Her senior colleagues recognized these qualities. Her mentor described Sue’s overall practice as “outstanding, innovative, high level with high expectations. She stands out as a teacher.” Another veteran colleague agreed. She explained how Sue rose to the challenge of conducting literature circles when other, more experienced fifth-grade teachers decided that their students were not ready for such activities. Moreover, she continued her novel studies beyond the period allowed by the district, again revealing how she exceeded the district’s curriculum in her resistance to the prescribed literacy program.

Sue’s principal also assessed her performance positively: “I think she’s a very strong teacher. She has a good background. She’s very bright and very reflective about her work. She sees herself as a professional educator and a leader and learner.” The principal said that Sue “did a wonderful job” in her first year with the second grade and was a “very brave and courageous teacher” in accepting the assignment to teach a combination grade 5–6 class. Sue was asked to serve on the school’s leadership team, which she did. At the end of the year, Sue’s students achieved significant gains on the standardized achievement test and scored significantly above both district and state averages.

Despite these highly positive assessments, Sue sensed that she was out of step with the district’s expectations for teachers: “What kids learn the most from is a teacher who is an individual. In my school and in my district, teachers are not respected for their individual talents anymore, but rather [if they] can stick to the program exactly.” Her words would prove prophetic.

#### —Professional Isolation

Sue’s sense of being out of step may have reflected her resistance, but it was also reinforced by the experience of isolation and lack of support shared by other new teachers in her school. Her mentor explained, “Sue’s biggest disappointment in the school and district was that she was excited about coming into a professional community, but found people very isolated and was disenchanting.” Because Sue taught a combination-grade class, she did not feel a part of either the fifth- or sixth-grade teams. More experienced teachers did not help Sue in thinking about how to deliver two curricula. The highly structured nature of the reading program also contributed to Sue’s difficulty. The Open Court coach indicated that she was not able to help Sue because it was impossible for one teacher to teach students on two grade levels. Sue said, “I feel like a left-handed person in a right-handed world. The district is not set up for split[grade classroom].” In addition, Sue reported not receiving supportive feedback from her principal:

I have the type of principal who walks into my classroom where there are forty amazing things going on. My kids are engaged, they are in the middle of some amazing conversation, and my principal . . . will find the one thing that I am not doing or the one picture on the wall that is tilted wrong.

Sue felt that at other times the principal simply ignored her. She attributed this to two factors. The principal did not know how to support Sue in her combination-grade assignment, and the principal was not concerned about Sue's students because she assumed that they would achieve well on the standardized test.

The only exception to Sue's isolation was her relationship with her mentor Pam, who visited once or twice a month. They had a strong bond. While Pam did attend to Sue's instructional practice, she mainly provided emotional support. "I held her as she cried," said Pam. Sue explained, "I would not have made it through these two years without [Pam]. She was just a total savior." With a scripted reading program, there was little reason for Sue and her mentor to discuss how to revise instruction. But when their discussions moved to Sue's use of literature circles and novel studies, Pam gave her thoughtful feedback.

### *System Response*

At the end of Sue's second year, she was released by her school and district. Sue was a probationary teacher, so she did not have recourse, nor was she given an explanation for her termination. Sue said, "I have had nothing but exemplary marks this year and last year, and yet I am still considered a temporary teacher, so I am losing my job in June, and I am not being asked back by the district. I am not up for tenure. I have a principal who has gone out of her way to make my life somewhat miserable this year. So, I don't work well with others. I don't know."

Although Sue received no formal explanation for why her contract was not renewed, others offered the informal explanation that Sue was deemed "not a team player." Sue's mentor Pam explained: "All I got from the principal and superintendent is that she is not a team player. I couldn't figure out what that meant. . . . The principal said several times throughout the year, 'Sue, well, I'm the boss.' Sue was either challenging or questioning; whether it was legitimate or not, she did not want to do the status quo."

Pam perceived Sue to be an outstanding teacher, but one who was out of step with public schools. "I think she's got the whole cycle of learning down where she teaches and then she reflects and then she assesses and then she plans. . . . It's been wonderful to have someone to challenge me and make me think. We've had wonderful conversations. She talks about reaching for the stars and not settling for mediocrity." However, Pam also explained that Sue was "not working with the system. . . . She reminds me of the type of teacher that should be in a very advanced private school. . . . She has a hard time with the public school system." Pam reported, "Nobody has been as vocal or nega-

tive about Open Court as Sue has. She is resistant to Open Court. I just feel part of being a teacher is learning to work within the system.” Sue’s own observation was, “I think had I kept my mouth shut and said less and said ‘yes’ more, I would be tenured now . . . I don’t know what I would tell somebody about navigating politics. What most people would say is, ‘Keep your mouth shut.’”

Sue’s treatment was not isolated. Another new teacher at her school was released at the end of the school year. Sue’s mentor explained that teacher morale at the school was very low because “Sue and the other gal are being dismissed when other colleagues see them as working hard, raising standards, and leading the standards of the teaching profession.” Another veteran colleague saw a larger pattern. She noted that in the past three or four years several new teachers had been dismissed:

We have seen new teachers come and go, and they haven’t gone voluntarily. . . . I think that there have been some teachers told that they’re not the right fit for this school, or are not team players. . . . Education has changed so much, everything now is very dictated by the state, which then trickles down to the district, then to the principal, and finally into the classroom.

Some veterans shared the novices’ frustration with the constraints that Open Court placed on their professional discretion. As one veteran teacher explained, “So many teachers . . . had so much creativity in [teaching literacy]. They had phenomenal thematic units that they wanted to use, and right now that is being put to the side, so a lot of the creativity that people entered the field of education with is being denied.”

In the end, Sue questioned the district’s vision of the profession: “What I’m feeling from the district is that teaching and education are not important. What’s important is the program that we’re using and following it, and individual style and teacher’s knowledge, and their abilities and their individuality should not come into play.” Sue was deeply disturbed by the practices of the school and district and by her dismissal after performing so well as a teacher. As a result, she planned to leave the profession: “I am left at the end of two years with nothing but, ‘You are an amazing teacher, but you are fired. You are out the door without even a letter of recommendation.’ . . . I hate to be a statistic, but I think I am dropping out.” Sue did not apply for a teaching position in the following year.

Sue began to question her conception of what it meant to be a professional, which had anchored her resistance:

I have always thought of myself as a professional, but I don’t know. That is a good question. I used to think that I knew, but I don’t think I know the answer to that anymore. I think I am an incredibly professional person [but] . . . I think my principal would disagree. My superintendent would disagree that I am a professional. So, in teaching, I don’t really know what being a professional means.

In reflecting back on the experiences, Sue ultimately reaffirmed her commitment to resistance even in the face of such extreme individual costs. She

expressed, “I realize that I probably may never get a job in a public school. I realize full well that when you get booted from a district with no letter of recommendation from your principal or superintendent, your resumé looks pretty bad. I think you lose things in the fight, and that you lose the fight itself when you are a new teacher.” Yet, she continued, “Still, if I had it to do over again, I wouldn’t change a thing because I was a great teacher, no one denies that, and good teaching was originally what I was hired for. All the other stuff is nothing compared to great teaching. Besides, I wasn’t half as feisty as I could have been.”

### Case Study Two: Rob

Rob, a White man in his twenties, grew up in a racially diverse but relatively affluent suburb in southern California, where he attended public schools. Rob’s mother encouraged him to teach, saying, “Rob, you’d be so good because you always could pick out the good [and bad] attributes in teachers. You’d come home and say, ‘I would never do this,’ as if you were a teacher.” In high school he moved to a rural community in the Northeast. As an undergraduate, he majored in elementary education and earned his teaching credential. He started teaching during his freshman year in college and student taught in a wealthy, predominantly White community. The literacy practices promoted by his teacher education program focused on thematic units, leveled reading, guided reading, and inquiry-focused teaching. Rob recalled that his cooperating teacher chose books that motivated her and thus her students, noting that she had “major ownership in teaching the lessons.” Rob believed that teaching was about such creativity and ownership.

Rob wanted to return to California, so he sent his resumé to several districts and received a call from a district in a part of California where he wanted to teach. He also “really liked the fact that I was going to be teaching at a school where it was very culturally diverse. . . . To affect one of these students, their success, means so much to me.” He planned to stay in the profession for a “really long time” and eventually become a school administrator. Rob’s fiancée was also a teacher, but in a neighboring, wealthy suburb.

#### *District Context*

Rob’s district confronted numerous challenges. Bayside School District was on the verge of state takeover because of noncompliance issues. It was embroiled in several legal issues and thus was under court monitor. Sixty percent of the teachers were not fully certified, and the annual turnover rate among teachers was 70 percent. Moreover, the district’s finances were problematic.

The district was deemed “underperforming” and consequently was monitored by the state. A number of the district’s schools had not improved adequately on the state’s Academic Performance Index and were on the verge of state takeover. The district reconstituted two of those schools. This meant dis-

missing all members of the instructional staff, although they were allowed to reapply for their positions, and recruiting new administrators and teachers. Then the superintendent left and an interim superintendent was appointed. In response to these accountability pressures, district administrators attempted to control instruction through mandates and prescriptive instructional policies. The district adopted a state-sanctioned literacy program, Open Court, and sought to prescribe teachers' practice. The district later adopted the state-approved literacy textbook, *High Point*, which is geared to students whose reading test scores fall two or more years below grade level.

The district originally embraced Open Court nine years prior to the period on which this study focuses. The district was part of an alliance that adopted Open Court and received the services of literacy coaches who monitored teachers' implementation. The assistant superintendent for instruction visited schools and heard from teachers that Open Court did not meet the needs of many ELLs and low-performing students. The teachers were frustrated because they were pressured to maintain the pace required by Open Court without having support for students who were falling behind.

For nearly two years, the assistant superintendent, who had substantial experience with Reading Recovery, worked subtly to loosen the reins of control around literacy instruction. She recognized that teachers "had not had a dialogue about literacy and how children learn." She noted, "Teachers who knew Open Court knew it from a technical sense. The book says I'm supposed to be on page 24 and it says I'm supposed to go to this other resource. I thought, well, do they really understand how you teach reading?" The assistant superintendent tried to foster dialogue among teachers to identify students' needs and to determine how to address them. She introduced teachers to ideas from Reading Recovery and explained, "That was kind of a quiet thing. No one even mentioned that [Reading Recovery trainers] were in the district. So we have some folks who are getting Reading Recovery trained who are very excited about it." She reported, though, that "[teachers] didn't feel at liberty to discuss other kinds of intervention programs. And so some teachers were kinda sneaking it in and there was a sort of 'ohh, you can't talk about it. The Open Court police will come and get you.'" This tension between teacher compliance and autonomy was reflected in a survey of new teachers in the district. Almost half (49%) of the new teachers reported that they followed the district's literacy program, even though more than a quarter (27%) reported that Open Court did not align with their own beliefs. Nearly half (49%) reported a school culture that supported experimentation with different literacy approaches ( $n=22$ ).

However, this would change. A new superintendent was appointed. She returned the district to an exclusive focus on Open Court and introduced the importance of program fidelity. The assistant superintendent explained, "The new superintendent feels we should not be distracted. Literacy should be our main focus. So we're going back to the kind of focus on just the full implemen-

tation of Open Court.” Others corroborated this shift. Mark, a veteran teacher, explained, “Messages of accountability have gotten stronger and stronger.” A teacher mentor identified a “dark and heavy culture of control and fear.” She also described how “some [teachers] choose to drop out because they find [Open Court] not effective . . . [and are] operating under fear. . . . ‘Am I going to get caught?’ is a common phrase.”

### *School Context*

Like the rest of the district, the Hoover School faced many challenges. It suffered from high rates of turnover among both teachers and administrators. Consequently, the majority of teachers were relatively new, and the principal sought to provide consistency. Hoover was categorized as “underperforming” and thus faced pressure to raise student achievement. Like the district, Hoover attempted to balance instructional control with teacher discretion. It followed the district’s directive to adopt Open Court, and teachers received training in this program. Most teachers fully implemented Open Court, while some expressed reservations. The school was also connected with an outside organization focused on professional development for teachers and principals. This organization, which provided mentors for new teachers, offered some alternatives to Open Court.

Hoover served 580 students in grades 4–8. Almost all (99%) of the students were from minority backgrounds, 78 percent were ELLs, and 79 percent received free/reduced-price lunches. Fully half of the teachers were brand new, and 80 percent had worked at the school for no more than two years. The staff faced resource challenges, including not having texts for their classes.

The principal, Brenda, was the fifth in five years. She grew up in the community and had worked in the district for over fifteen years. Brenda was committed to supporting new teachers: “It’s challenging teaching here with some of the language barriers, the economic issues, and the social issues that kids bring with them. So, we have to give teachers more support to retain the best.” She planned on remaining in her position to create a climate of stability and because she was committed to the students: “I am these kids and I believe in them.”

Brenda explained that Hoover adopted Open Court and *High Point*, thus “following in line with the district and the state.” She observed that “new teachers like [Open Court] because it gives them right away what to say and what to do.” The principal continued, “Open Court is very prescriptive. In the teacher’s edition it tells the teacher what to say, how to say it, a lot of sounding out sounds, very structured.” She confronted a tension between complying with the district-adopted and -monitored reading program and supporting teacher autonomy in seeking ways to serve students from diverse backgrounds and with different needs. A mentor who worked with new teachers explained, “Last year they had Open Court ‘Nazis’ come in and the principal was frightened about going against the district.”

On balance, the school mirrored the district's control of literacy instruction, although departures from Open Court existed and, to an extent, were accommodated. A mentor of new teachers emphasized the control orientation of the school and district culture: "From an outsider's view, it feels like there are directives coming down. Make sure you do this, this, and this. It just seems to be top down here." Other teachers offered somewhat different views, reflecting the ongoing tension between instructional control and professional autonomy. One of the rare veteran teachers at Hoover commented, "I have no problem with the script. I mean, it's just another way to do it and what they're doing is they're making sure that it gets done. The only complaint, of course, is the standard one, that you can't individualize for the children that need it." Another teacher revealed some resistance to the district-adopted reading program among her colleagues: "I have talked to others who have said, 'I really don't like this program. I think it is not interesting for the kids.' I think there are more people who are interested in more balanced approaches in our [teaching of] literacy."

Professional development opportunities reflected the emphasis on instructional control of teachers through Open Court and the limited accommodation of approaches that emphasize teacher discretion. The publisher of Open Court provided training for teachers. Teachers also engaged in professional development activities involving other approaches. They participated in staff collaboration, learned about writing strategies from an external consultant, and received training in computer-assisted assessment.

The school was also linked to a professional development community that reached beyond the district. Funded by a private foundation, this professional development organization launched a school-based, professional development initiative with two schools in the district. It placed a team of mentors to support new teachers and principals and to work with some district administrators.

### *A New Teacher's Experiences*

Rob's work was driven by professional principles, which influenced his approach to teaching literacy and, thus, contributed to his resisting the district's reading program. Rob's effort to develop an approach to literacy instruction that better fit his professional philosophy was strongly supported by his mentor, who connected him to a professional community outside his school (referenced above).

#### —Professional Principles

Rob's strong reaction to the district's literacy program reflected the professional principles to which he was committed: teacher autonomy and creativity, instruction that focused on the individual needs of diverse students, community, and high expectations. These values were evident in his criticism of Open Court: "I feel as if it has taken the creativity out of my class, out of my teach-

ing.” Rob reflected, “I don’t know if this is just a power issue . . . but I don’t enjoy being told what to do every day. That is kind of how I felt when I was teaching Open Court. . . . [Prescriptive programs] just don’t hold true with my philosophy.” He continued, “You can do almost no prep and teach it . . . but [my students] were not learning from it.” Rob explained, “You should design the program around your students, not the students around a program. . . . We have students of all different abilities. We should look at each of their individual abilities and work with them and find something that will work for each of them at different levels.” Rob’s class of twenty-six fifth graders was linguistically and culturally diverse. It included twenty ELLs (sixteen Spanish, four Tongan), four Samoans, and two African Americans. Almost all of his students were from low-income backgrounds and historically performed poorly on the state’s standardized achievement test.

Rob was committed to teaching literacy by employing a more “balanced approach” that better reflected his professional principles. Guided by his beliefs that teaching should be about creativity and addressing the needs of different learners, he “decided to do a literature-based program using novels, where the students would be able to gain more ownership [by] reading the whole book, rather than short excerpts.” Thus, in resisting the district’s reading program, Rob extended the curriculum beyond the limited Open Court anthology. His approach also developed a community of learners in which students engaged in dialogue and focused on novels and literature study.

Rob shared his concerns and plans with Brenda, his principal, and proposed employing a literature-based approach, which would still teach to the state’s standards. Although Brenda had observed Rob’s initial efforts to employ literature-based instruction and liked what she had seen, she was under state and district pressure to follow the school-improvement plan and curriculum. She explained, “We’re going to have a state compliance review. We use these funds for textbooks, and Rob’s not using the state adopted texts. . . . So I’m pressuring him that ‘yes, we have to be compliant.’” Still, Brenda was sympathetic to Rob’s approaches and saw that his students were engaged. Thus, she found herself in an awkward position: “The conflict now is within me.”

Hoover School’s approach to professional development generally squared with Rob’s commitment to building community. Teachers described professional development as relatively sustained and beneficial. They were provided times during the week to work together: forty minutes every day as core teachers, once a week as grade-level teams, once a month as districtwide grade-level teams, and twice a month at staff meetings. Rob’s grade-level team met weekly. He most consistently worked with Lisa, another novice on his team. They met twice a week to coplan literacy instruction, develop materials and lessons, and share feedback on their teaching.

However, for both Rob and Lisa, the limitations of their two-day summer training on Open Court reflected the absence of teacher creativity. According to Lisa, the trainer “just went over the book, word for word.” In response, Rob

and Lisa began to develop curricula and share resources. They embodied the principle of community by supporting each other in meetings and mutually advocating instructional approaches that departed from Open Court.<sup>4</sup>

In order to implement their plans, Rob and Lisa had to find novels that were appropriate for his students' reading levels. The school did not have the resources to support literature studies. Relying on creativity and the broader educational community, Rob applied for and received a grant from an external educational agency. With the \$1,000 grant he bought class-set novels. Rob and Lisa continued to meet weekly to plan their novel study, picking some strategies from Open Court and addressing the state's standards.

Rob's professional principles were evident in a unit he taught, which used the book *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 2001). His commitment to teacher creativity was reflected in the fact that he developed the lessons, departing from Open Court. In keeping with the principle of community, Rob pulled half of the class onto the rug to hold a discussion summarizing the chapter they had read. The group discussed the purposes and elements of a summary. Reflecting his commitment to high expectations, Rob had students review a summary that he wrote. The students decided that Rob's summary lacked details. They proceeded to write a better summary. In a series of exchanges, Rob attended to individual students by having each of them identify the characters, describe them and their relationships, and establish the setting.

Rob's and Lisa's students scored well on a districtwide literacy assessment, which was administered during the first half of the school year. Their students received the highest scores in the school and the highest scores for students at their grade level across the district. By the end of the year, Rob's students showed gains on their standardized achievement tests as well.

The principal's overall assessment of Rob's performance was extremely positive. She described Rob as "my rookie of the year." She gave an example that reflected Rob's commitment to serving each student and building community:

He had one difficult student who I moved to a different site, and Rob was not happy about that. Any other teacher would say, "Thank you for taking this child." But not Rob; he said, "I really want her." He's a hard worker. He believes in collaboration. He's becoming a leader among his colleagues.

Rob's principal attributed his success in part to his use of instructional strategies that departed from Open Court: "I was somewhat afraid for them to do literature because you have to be really experienced or at least fully delve into literature to do that. He's able to do that because he really teaches the skills through literature."

—Mentor Relationship

Rob's mentor, Maya, met with him to support his professional development. Maya was also part of a larger schoolwide initiative supporting the professional

development of teachers throughout the school. Maya played a crucial role by coaching Rob in balanced literary approaches, connecting him to a community of practice, serving as his advocate, and supporting his development of “political literacy.”

Maya facilitated Rob’s development of a balanced approach to literacy instruction in numerous ways. She coached him in shared reading and writing, interactive reading and writing, and guided reading and writing. She modeled lessons in his classrooms, coplanned lessons and units, assessed his students’ reading levels, analyzed student work, and provided resources on cooperative learning, heterogeneous grouping, and differentiated instructional theory and strategies. Maya introduced some Reading Recovery strategies. Finally, she worked with her sponsoring organization to develop a book room with classroom sets of leveled books.

Maya connected Rob with other new teachers in the school. More importantly, Maya also connected Rob to a professional community outside his district. She obtained funds to support a team of teachers, including Rob, to attend a literacy conference that promoted new approaches to literacy instruction. She took Rob to observe three teachers outside his district, who modeled instructional approaches in which Rob was interested: “It blew him away. It solidified what he knew internally that he wanted to do.” These experiences gave Rob a vision of the possible, connecting him to an extended professional community. Maya observed, “What enabled Rob to resist? I think our support. . . . We’re here to say ‘you can, you know you can.’ I don’t think he would have stayed here if we weren’t here to support him [by] saying, ‘yeah, you can.’”

Maya acted as Rob’s advocate with his principal and district administrators. Rob recalled, “She was checking out for me, would it be okay if a teacher comes up with his own lessons.” Maya and her mentor colleagues presented literacy ideas to district administrators and school board members, which inspired discussions of alternative approaches to teaching literacy. Maya assured Rob that “we were talking at the higher levels, where we infiltrated.”

Maya also facilitated Rob’s becoming more politically literate in his ability to read, navigate, and advocate in the political climate of school and district (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Rob explained, “Maya really helped me out when it came to the politics in this school.” She helped Rob advocate on his own behalf and explained how it was vital to find political allies and build relationships. She also emphasized the importance of having professional principles at the heart of advocacy. Maya explained that she told novices to “trust what is right in your heart,” to explore their true “values about what is right.”

### *System Response*

The ground shifted under Rob between his first and second years. During his first year, he felt that his principal supported his approach to literacy instruction: “I will be at this school until the principal leaves probably. I would not be

at this school or at this district if I was not given the freedom that I was this year.”

However, during the summer after Rob’s first year, the district hired a new superintendent who introduced the importance of fidelity in implementing Open Court. The assistant superintendent explained, “We’re going back to the kind of focus on just the full implementation of Open Court.” Rob’s mentor reported that “fidelity to the program” had become a significant part of the district administration’s lexicon.

This hit Rob hard. Over the summer, he and a colleague on his new fourth-grade team developed interdisciplinary thematic units that included literacy, novel studies, and comprehension skills development. They were so excited to share their ideas that they met with the principal on their return to school in August. During a meeting with his mentor, Rob recounted the principal’s response:

It shows that the two of you were focused and devoted [over] the summer, that you put a lot of thought into this year, but [the new superintendent] is curriculum-based and it’s mandatory that every classroom is using the state-adopted text. We have a pacing guide. You need to be on the same page [on] the same day because we are getting assessed districtwide on Open Court.

Rob remained committed to his instructional principles. His immediate thoughts after this meeting with the principal were, “I wish I knew this. I would have quit. I would not have come back here this year. . . . I wanted to teach, I love working with the students here. But I don’t like doing it handcuffed.” He explained to his mentor that he was considering leaving the district. But he also indicated that he would do his thematic literature-based program, employing some of the Open Court curriculum during the first block of the day and spending the rest of the day on the curriculum that he and his colleague had developed.

Rob experienced mounting pressure to comply with the district-mandated reading program. His principal visited his classroom, and Rob was almost “written up” for not adhering to Open Court. In the next conference with his mentor, Rob expressed tremendous frustration with Open Court, which he believed did not meet the needs of his students. Rob explained, “I am not having a good year. . . . This Open Court is like a cancer.” He also expressed concern that the colleague with whom he worked over the summer was losing her commitment to literature studies because she too was being pressured to use Open Court. He was reaching his limit: “I can’t do this and I won’t. I did not agree to come back here this year to do [Open Court]. . . . I am not getting the support I got last year.”

Rob’s mentor tried to reassure him: “I just want you to know you are not alone in the district. There are these little pods of people that are thinking exactly the way you are.” She asked him to think about ways he could maintain his approaches while protecting himself: “How could you get across if some-

one walked in your room that Open Court is happening, but then you can do what you need to do to make sure that you are accelerating your kids?"

By the spring of his second year, Rob was pulling together his portfolio to apply for a job in a neighboring school district that had a less prescriptive teaching environment and served a more affluent community. That district offered Rob a position teaching sixth grade, which he accepted. During his exit interview, he explained, "I was not happy with the way that . . . the direction of the district, . . . especially in regards to their literacy program [was going]. . . . I just feel deep down inside of me that I would not grow professionally in this environment and that is something that is very important to me."

## Discussion

Our findings contribute to discussions on two topics that are gaining the attention of educational practitioners and researchers. First, in exploring the principled roots of teacher resistance, the two cases highlight two important dimensions: resistance that arises from deep commitments rather than psychological deficits, and the individual costs of resistance. Second, in examining the control exerted by fidelity, the case studies reveal three issues that complicate understanding of resistance in the current policy climate: how technical and moralistic control systems limit dissent and debate; the challenge of systems that inhibit teacher control; and the paradoxical relationship between human agency and the limits of individual resistance, which highlights the importance of professional communities. We close by considering the implications of our findings for educational research and theory, policy, and practice.

### *Principled Resistance among Novice Teachers*

This study challenges the dominant portrayal of teacher resistance as a conservative act (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995) that is rooted in a flawed personality. Our discussion is informed by a framework based on sociological and educational research traditions that examine resistance, conflict, and the micro-politics of organizational life (Achinstein, 2002a; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Giroux, 1983).

The two cases highlighted in this study reveal that these teachers' resistance to their districts' instructional policies was rooted in professional principles, rather than in psychological deficits or a basic reluctance to change. Both teachers engaged in resistance that was firmly based in professional principles: a *principled resistance*. The program they were expected to use ran against their conceptions of teaching and professionalism. Their resistance was manifest both in their discourse and in their instructional practices. These professional principles are not idiosyncratic to these two individuals. Rather, they are rooted in widely shared conceptions of teaching and professionalism, which align with definitions of high-quality, reflective professionals who adjust their teaching to the needs of diverse students, foster high expectations, cre-

ate learning communities among students, engage in self-critical dialogue about their practice with colleagues, possess specialized expertise, and employ repertoires of instructional strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, n.d.; Shulman, 1987; Sykes, 1999).

These cases also uncover the depth of the teachers' commitment to their principles, as well as the potential for agency within a seemingly larger control environment. Both teachers took risks, despite their professional vulnerability. Even after being released, Sue held tenaciously to her principles, explaining, "Still, if I had it to do over again, I wouldn't change a thing because . . . all the other stuff is nothing compared to great teaching." Both teachers engaged in sustained resistance in the face of district administrations that mandated not only *what* but *how* to teach. Thus, these new teachers faced more daunting challenges than those in Gitlin and Margonis's (1995) study, which examined why teachers, including veterans, resisted site-based reform where teachers were called upon to design the focus for reform.

The case studies also challenge the findings of previous research that novices necessarily succumb to the dominant culture. Schempp et al. (1993) found that micropolitical issues "pressure[d] new teachers to forsake their ideals and education and accept the conditions and standards of the schools as they presently existed" (p. 469). The resistance documented in our cases represents a disruption of the accommodation that results when novices eschew commitments and become institutionally compliant (Lacey, 1977). In our cases, novices strengthened their professional commitments in *opposition* to the institutional pressures.

While this article highlights the positive aspects of resistance, it also acknowledges its challenges. The consequences of resistance for the novices in our study were dire: one left the profession and the other left his job. Job security is not to be taken lightly, nor can one advocate for novices to make themselves vulnerable to overwhelming political forces. The emotional costs for both teachers were heavy. They responded with anger, sadness, depression, and exhaustion. Furthermore, not all resistance should be considered in a positive or emancipatory light (Bullough, Gitlin, & Goldstein, 1984; Giroux, 1983), particularly if it is not rooted in professional principles.

### *Control and Resistance in the Profession*

By examining the intersection between teachers' principled resistance and the current policy environment of instructional control, this study reveals a deeper story about how the educational system approaches those who question and challenge instructional mandates. The recent move toward greater instructional prescription and heightened assessment and accountability presents a potent control system. Rowan and Miskel (1999) explain: "As an institutional environment becomes more unitary, as rules about work in the technical core become more specific, and as these rules get attached to outcome

assessments or other inspection systems, institutional theory (like organization theory more generally) predicts stronger effects of institutionalized rules on work activities” (p. 373). The current policy environment is characterized by these very conditions of technical control. Federal, state, and district policies are aligned to form a unitary environment; instructional policies mandate prescriptive instructional programs; assessment and sanctioning mechanisms are combined in school accountability systems. Thus, it is difficult for teachers to resist instructional mandates, opening the doors of classrooms where teachers previously could resist with some impunity (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

Administrators in both districts directed teachers to implement Open Court with fidelity. On the surface, the technical control exerted by fidelity appears straightforward. It can be traced to the concept of treatment fidelity in clinical trials where, for example, a new drug must be administered in the prescribed dosage at the prescribed time intervals under prescribed dietary conditions to truly assess its efficacy. And, in broader applications, an approved drug must be administered with fidelity to ensure results. In our two case studies, district and school administrators enforced fidelity to improve the academic performance of students by requiring teachers to adhere to Open Court’s pedagogical script, use only materials provided by the program, and cover the material at the prescribed pace. Fidelity left little or no room for teacher discretion and thus suppressed teachers’ reflection and discussion. Data reveal that beneath the surface, the basis of technical control in the two districts was tenuous. Technical control requires that the prescribed treatment be known to produce particular results under specified conditions. Instructional programs that are organized by grade levels, like Open Court, claim that the prescribed curriculum materials and instructional practices will enable all children at each grade level to attain grade-appropriate academic skills. Sue and Rob questioned this assumption. While they saw value in some aspects of the program, they balked at the limitations it placed on their creativity in adapting to students’ needs.

Ironically, the district and site administrators who demanded fidelity acted in three ways that were not consistent with the application of technical control. First, administrators gave Sue and Rob positive teaching evaluations and noted that their students performed well on a variety of assessments of literacy skills, implicitly acknowledging that Open Court was not necessarily the best way to teach literacy. Second, Sue’s district admitted that it was impossible to use Open Court in her grade 5–6 combination class, thus reinforcing her stance that the program did not enable teachers to adapt to their students’ needs. Third, administrators did not tell Sue that she was being released because she failed to implement the district’s literacy program. Instead, their informal explanation was that Sue had not been a “team player,” emphasizing a failure to comply with norms and values. The words and behavior of the new teachers, of some of their colleagues, and of administrators reveal that the as-

sumption on which technical control is based — that exact replication of prescribed protocols will produce infallible results — was neither wholly accepted nor reliably enacted in the two districts.

Thus, in addition to the technical control exerted by instructional policies and programs, we uncovered a moralistic turn in control, which emphasizes adherence to norms and values. This form of control has been characterized as ideological or normative, where the cultural constructions created in institutions and the social realities that underlie institutions provide justification or legitimation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Thompson, 1980). These normative controls shape the nature of discourse, determining what is allowable and “right.”

Moralistic control is reflected in the informal explanation for Sue’s non-renewal — she was not a team player — and in her observation: “I think had I kept my mouth shut and said less and said ‘Yes’ more, I would be tenured now.” It is also apparent in Rob’s recognition that his survival was political rather than technical: “I definitely had a crash course in learning [the politics of schools] this year.” Moralistic control is reflected in the reasons behind the new teachers’ resistance to Open Court. Sue and Rob resisted the program because they did not believe that it was consistent with their professional principles, which emphasized individuality and creativity for students and teachers, high expectations, and community.

Moralistic control compounds the stifling effect that technical control can have on teacher reflection, discussion, and debate of instructional practice. By emphasizing compliance with norms conveyed by directive, the districts created forbidding environments for teachers and site administrators. Educators used dramatic language to characterize program oversight. Sue described her district and school as “prison-like,” while a district administrator referred to consultants as “the Open Court police.” A mentor teacher described a situation where “Open Court ‘Nazis’ came in and the principal was really frightened about going against the district.” Even if educators were using these terms hyperbolically, the severity of the language reflects the silencing fear that teachers and administrators experienced. Thus, the enforcement of fidelity in these two districts required teachers, who did not believe that Open Court reflected their principles, to employ the program’s materials, instructional scripts, and pacing guides without deviation. Sue and Rob and others experienced this control as coercive, which silenced dissent and drove alternative practices underground.

The responses of the two new teachers during their exit interviews reveal how deeply principles, rather than technical issues, were involved. Rob, who left voluntarily (some might say he was pushed out), explained how “deep down inside of me” he could not grow professionally in that environment. Sue, released from her district, began questioning herself: “I have always thought of myself as a professional, but I don’t know . . . I used to think that I knew, but I don’t think I know the answer to that anymore.”

Together the technical and moral controls create what McNeill (2000) has characterized as a closed system. She explains that the emphasis on accountability and standardization, including prescriptive instructional controls, does not accommodate substantive critique but allows teachers only to “tinker” with the set program. She notes, “The technical language of accountability silences those professionals who want to stay in public education because it takes away the legitimacy for any other, counter language to shape school practice” (p. 263).

Thus teachers who question state-authorized and district-adopted programs are deemed “resistant” and deviant, and are pushed out of the profession or compelled to leave the school. Use of the term fidelity to characterize adherence to the literacy program suggests that dissent is an expression of “infidelity.” Instructional policy environments that define professionalism in terms of fidelity and, thus, infidelity do not leave room for dissent and disagreement. This is consistent with Hargreaves’s (1994) notion of “heretics,” where a strong sense of mission can cultivate loyalty and commitment, but can also “create heresy among those who question, differ and doubt” (p. 163). Hargreaves (2003) revisits this metaphor in his recent examination of centrally prescribed curriculum reforms and high-stakes accountability. He deems this a “new orthodoxy” of educational reform, which requires educators to embrace one text with “total allegiance,” where the failure to comply can result in excommunication from the profession.

Yet, uncertainty and questioning lie at the heart of teaching (Doyle, 1986; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Lortie, 1975; McDonald, 1992; Rosenholtz, 1989). Indeed, the absence of knowledge about how best to facilitate learning makes questioning and challenging decisions about practice central to teaching. Leading scholars uphold conceptions of teachers as reflective practitioners who question and inquire within a community of practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Schön, 1983). Resistance involves challenging extant definitions of the situation (Carlson, 1987) or questioning the previously unquestionable, and thus can also provide avenues for learning and for generating alternative solutions to problems (Nemeth, 1989). If dissent offers a place for learning, what does this say about the future of teacher professionalism in a climate of instructional control that suppresses dissent? Are the new teachers in our study like the proverbial canaries in the coal mine, giving us early warning signs about threats to the profession?

Proponents argue that specifying outcomes, holding educators accountable, and standardizing practice are effective ways to improve educational achievement. Yet, schools and districts like those in our study may be creating conditions in which teachers cannot enact principles of the profession. There are contradictory aims in the current policy environment about teachers as professionals — one version where they are highly qualified reflective practitioners and the other where they are implementers of mandated programs. Our study suggests that the price we pay for the unitary control environment

may be the loss of professional control by teachers who seek to improve practice and thus improve educational achievement.

Research has documented the importance of teacher control — the power to make decisions and to influence behaviors or other individuals (Bacharach & Conley, 1989; Ingersoll, 2003; McDonald, 1992). Limited teacher control is associated with higher levels of student behavior problems, conflicts among teachers, and teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 1996, 2003). Moreover, given the technical uncertainty of teaching, strong controls of instructional practice may increase the costs of enforcement without producing anticipated improvements in performance (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Ultimately, such controlling policies can exacerbate, rather than relieve, problems by reducing the control and flexibility teachers need to work effectively, thus undermining a major source of teacher satisfaction and motivation. As Ingersoll (2003) keenly observes, “Having little say in the terms, processes, and outcomes of their work may undermine the ability of teachers to feel they are doing worthwhile work — the very reason many of them came into the occupation in the first place — and may end up contributing to turnover among teachers” (pp. 236–237).

While the two cases in many ways highlight the determinism of policy and organizational controls, they also expose a source of teacher agency. One teacher’s resistance was sustained by a link to an extended professional community beyond his district, providing an alternative vision of the profession. Giroux (1983) discusses how reproduction theories downplay the importance of human agency, resistance, and potential to challenge dominant forces in education. Giddens (1987) also raises the importance of agency in the face of determinism. Ultimately, the presence of resistance demonstrates that there is some degree of freedom, albeit a “relative autonomy” (Giroux, 1983), within a larger system of control.

The resistance of the two new teachers was principled, which, as Giroux explains, “redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation” (1983, p. 289). The teachers’ resistance is also illuminated by Willis’s (1977) study, where working-class students engage in a political act by challenging the hidden curriculum in schooling as it serves to reproduce inequalities. The teachers in our study similarly resisted the mandated literacy program because it lowered expectations and limited engagement with higher-order learning. Both new teachers also described how the programs diminished their professional autonomy and judgment, treating them as laborers rather than expert practitioners.

However, there are limits to individual resistance, which leave the individual vulnerable and can even result in reproducing the status quo. Willis’s (1977) “lads” and, similarly, Fine’s (1991) “drop outs” resisted the dominant culture of schools. However, the students resisted as individuals, which weakened their political impact (Anyon, 1983), leaving them vulnerable and limiting the impact of their resistance (Carlson, 1987). The students were thus cut

off from political and social pathways to transform their conditions and the conditions of schooling (Giroux, 1983).

Sue's case shows that isolated individual resistance is not enough to sustain the resistance or the individual. Rob's case describes how a novice's connection to an external professional community that provided space for alternative ideas and a link to an inside-school proximal community with a grade-level colleague sustained the novice in his first year. Where Sue felt isolated in her school and district, Rob benefited from his connection to a professional community that extended beyond the culture of his school and district. This allowed Rob space to question and express disagreement with his district's approach to literacy instruction. Rob's mentor linked him to a community of practice by creating one with other novices in the school and taking Rob to observe other like-minded teachers throughout the region. These experiences gave Rob a vision of the possible and connected him to an alternate, extended professional community. Thus community ties mattered and in some ways offered a life line to persist. Rob's case offered a glimpse into the possibility of the power of a professional community supporting more collective resistance. Carlson (1987) argues similarly that teachers' interests are collective and their collective occupational culture is a powerful force in the schools.

Yet, when the control system tightened in Rob's second year of teaching, his connection to his mentor and the external community could not sustain him. The tightening of control attenuated the impact of an extended professional community. Furthermore, the increased control caused Rob's fourth-grade colleague and collaborator to succumb, and thus Rob lost his internal sub-community. In some sense, the tightening of controls and refocus on fidelity sealed off the borders around the school, limiting Rob's access to extended ties and alternative perspectives. Borders delineate which people and ideas belong within a specific community, and also define the permeability and inclusivity of that community and what ideas lie beyond its boundaries (Achinstein, 2002b). As borders were raised, Rob began to feel more isolated and "in this alone."

Thus this study points to the novice's need for a sense of community in resistance. Their resistance could not be sustained alone; rather, they needed to be supported by a strong community that reinforced their alternative perspectives and the continuous questioning of the dominant messages. Rob's mentor's words are an important reminder of this connection with other dissenting voices: "I just want you to know you are not alone in the district. There are these little pods of people that are thinking exactly the way you are."

## Implications

Ultimately, these cases provide an important critique of the current direction in narrowing educational discourse and debate on purposes and practices in teaching. As authors, teachers, and teacher educators, we wondered why such

highly qualified and strong practitioners were leaving their schools and profession. It was their critical thinking, questioning, and commitment to reaching all students that was seen as “resistance” and “infidelity.” Sue’s departure from the profession and Rob’s exit from his district reveal a policy climate that is intolerable to teachers who adhere to certain professional principles.

Because this study is based principally on case the studies of two teachers, its findings are more suggestive than conclusive. However, what the findings suggest is deeply troubling, and thus warrants the attention of researchers and theorists, policymakers and practitioners.

### *Research and Theory*

The study contributes to advancing theory on the importance of teacher resistance and calls for additional research in three critical areas. First, while research has begun to highlight the positive rationale for teacher resistance from an individual perspective (resistance as good sense from a teacher’s point of view), this study highlights what resistance reveals about the larger system of control in the current educational environment. An understanding of resistance takes on increasing salience as the control environment contributes to limiting discourse about the profession. This article exposes the impact of a system of technical and moralistic control in a unitary policy environment and begs for further investigation of the interplay between resistant teachers (and their agency) within policy environments of varying degrees of control.

Second, the cases challenge research on teacher resistance, which is often cast as a psychological deficit or reluctance to change. This study offers instances of resistance based on professional principles and reveals a need for more research on how, why, and which principles may inform teacher resistance. Third, the study explores the costs of resistance for individuals, schools, and the profession. Moreover, it reveals the unintended consequences of the resister whose exit may serve to reinforce the status quo by eliminating their voice of dissent and by reaffirming that resisters will be pushed out. These individual and collective costs and benefits must be examined further and understood at the level of individual, school, and profession.

### *Policy*

This article raises questions about the unintended consequences of policies meant to improve student achievement and elevate the bar for quality teaching that instead “push out” highly effective teachers. Loss of teacher control has many unintended consequences, including student behavior challenges, lack of collegiality, and teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2003). A primary concern from this study is that highly professional, successful new teachers are lost to their schools and the profession. If such policies undermine commitment among novices of great potential, then the solution is creating new problems in the system.

Furthermore, the policy climate of control undermines fundamental principles of the profession by limiting debate and questions about practice. Ultimately, it is only through open dialogue, debate, and expression of dissent that new thinking about teaching and the profession can emerge. Policies that, when enacted, limit the bounds of thinkable thought (Chomsky, 1989), the arena of discourse, and the solutions considered threaten to diminish learning in the profession.

### *Practice*

This article also speaks to practitioners, raising questions about how the profession supports new teachers who espouse principles of professionalism that are at odds with the control environment. It explores strategies used by teachers to navigate such systems and highlights the support provided by teacher collaboration, mentoring, and professional networks beyond the school walls. The article suggests a need to develop strategies and interventions to support quality teachers and looks to extended professional communities to sustain alternative visions in the face of the status quo. It may be that pockets of resistance will provide a direction for agency and change and keep alternative perspectives alive in the face of strong control environments. For teachers, the study suggests that those who wish to challenge the dominant system seek allies in a network of professional communities, where norms of inquiry and reflection are supported. Further, for teachers, administrators, and new teacher mentors, the study highlights the importance of reading the political landscape, understanding the costs of taking a stand on professional principles, and the problems of isolated resistance. New teachers' and administrators' jobs may be on the line, highlighting the toll of resistance on individuals.

Finally, the article raises the issue of how individuals respond to instructional policies in high-control environments. It intensifies a focus on agency that individuals exert within seemingly deterministic systems. The actions of the two novices remind us of the responsibility we bear as professionals to take account of our own principles and act according to them. Thus, teachers, site administrators, and district administrators must reflect on their professional principles and ask themselves how they will respond to and redefine the current environment.

### Notes

1. This definition draws from research on both teaching and professionalism (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; Hargreaves, 2003; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, n.d.; Shulman, 1987; Sykes, 1999).
2. All individual, school, and district names are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.
3. Survey scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree, does not apply.
4. Rob's commitment to professional community was also in play when he realized that Lisa would be moving out of state the following year, and he met with Brenda to request

a move to the fourth-grade team, where a group of other new teachers would form a team of like-minded educators. Brenda agreed that Rob could move.

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