

INTRODUCTION

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TEACHERS WHO WORK IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS face myriad demands for compliance from an array of powerful actors: school leaders, politicians, highly paid consultants, and textbook publishers, just to name a few. Within this context, teachers' resistance is often interpreted simply as insubordination or recalcitrance. However, teacher educators, educational researchers, policy makers, and school leaders miss valuable information about how to support and motivate teachers when they fail to differentiate the motivations that result in different forms of teacher resistance.

With this book, we argue that some forms of resistance should be characterized as principled resistance, and we provide a new framework for understanding three principles upon which such resistance may emerge.¹

This volume brings together a range of senior scholars and activist teachers to explore the concept of principled resistance as a necessary and ethical response to mandates that conflict with their understandings about quality teaching and the role of education in a democracy. Each chapter describes one teacher or group of

teachers who attempt to resolve ethical dilemmas that arise when their beliefs about the purposes, significance, and standards of their work are in conflict with the policies and practices they are expected to enact.

The multiple perspectives on principled resistance presented in this volume enable us to highlight a tradition of teachers striving to shape a more just and democratic society, through and beyond their schools and work lives. Historical chapters on principled resistance reveal teachers' long-standing roles in social progress through their interpretations of their professional responsibilities. First-person contemporary accounts of principled resistance enable current teachers, who face significant demands for compliance in instruction and curricula, to envision ways to protect the mission that drew them to and sustains them in their work. Research by teacher educators invites critical discussions about the purpose and principles that should guide the teaching profession today.

Three Categories of Principles

The chapters in this book are organized by three general categories of principles that may motivate teachers' principled resistance: pedagogical, professional, and democratic. Principled resistance is rarely guided by a single principle, but we make these distinctions to highlight the kinds of concerns that disrupt teachers' sense of good work. As a heuristic device, these categories reveal that principled resistance is an expression of teachers' understanding of professional ethics, not simply a reaction out of personal preference. No particular principle is more important than the others, but each principle enables us to ask specific kinds of ethical questions about the multidimensional work of teaching.

Teachers articulate *pedagogical principles* when they make claims about working with students and the curriculum. When

faced with a dilemma, teachers refer to pedagogical principles in their responses to the following questions: What is the best way for me to teach this concept, skill, or topic? What is the best way for me to teach this student or this group of students? These kinds of principles usually articulate beliefs about teachers' responsibility to support students' well-being, academic engagement, and positive outcomes. They reference beliefs about best practices, child development, youth psychology, subject-specific norms, and assessments. Principled resistance in this category can take many forms, including altering prescribed teaching materials, refusing to engage in mandated practices, or taking steps to change the policies that affect teaching and learning.

When teachers make claims that they possess power, knowledge, and judgment unique to their role, they express *professional principles*. When faced with a dilemma, teachers articulate professional principles in their responses to the question, how should I act and be treated as a teacher? For instance, teachers who express concerns about how decisions are made in their schools may be signaling that the professionalism of teachers is being violated. Concerns about salary—whether teachers can earn a living wage, or the effects of merit pay—are an invocation of professional principles. Principled resistance based on professional principles may take the form of teachers demanding rights as members of a profession with special training, knowledge, and experience. Teachers also articulate professional principles when they make claims about what teaching is and is not that extend beyond their own classrooms; many professional principles can also refer to pedagogical principles. Principled resistance is a result of teachers who respect and value their special role as public servants expected to uphold education policies of various kinds. If teachers disregarded that dimension of their work, as common portrayals of teacher resistance suggest, no dilemma of professional principles would surface.

Teachers affirm *democratic principles* when they make claims about how teachers and public schools should function in a democratic society. When faced with a dilemma, teachers articulate democratic principles in responding to the following questions: How is this school preparing its students for democratic futures? How am I promoting and embodying democratic participation? These beliefs may focus on the school as a key institution in a democracy or the role of teachers as public figures in a democracy. Principled resistance in this category may be argued on the grounds of promoting civil rights, encouraging democratic participation, or modeling democratic behavior. It is always possible for pedagogical principles and professional principles to be intertwined with democratic principles. For instance, arguments for a more inclusive curriculum or culturally competent teaching are articulations of pedagogical principles that are informed by democratic principles.

Within each category, there is room for disagreement and debate about teachers' actions and responses based on the principles described above. Taking professional principles as an example, some groups of teachers may believe that merit pay is the proper recognition for educators who perform at higher levels than their colleagues. Others may argue that collegiality and collaboration are jeopardized by the focus on student outcomes based on standardized test scores underlying merit pay schemes. A principle does not settle the matter, but it provides an axis that makes one's claims and judgments comprehensible on ethical grounds.

The Nature of Resistance

Although theories of student and youth resistance have exercised substantial influence on the field of education, research on teacher resistance has been sparse.² Educational leadership research often approaches teacher resistance as an obstructionist tactic to be

overcome.³ This limited view of resistance restricts the knowledge that can be gained from analyzing principled resistance, as well as the range of productive responses to teachers' resistance. As the research on youth reveals, we can read teachers' acts of resistance as expressions of their agency and intelligence.⁴

Some studies have highlighted the possibility that teacher dissatisfaction and school reform may be fueled by conflicts between the values teachers bring to their work and the principles that inform schooling and school reform.⁵ Teaching has long been known as a profession with a high rate of attrition, yet US figures far exceed those of other countries.⁶ In 2011, only 44 percent of teachers reported that they were "very satisfied" with their jobs, the lowest percentage in over twenty years, down from 62 percent just three years prior.⁷ Social networking and the rise of media platforms such as YouTube have allowed teachers to publicize their reasons for leaving the profession, and many of them describe tensions between their principles and the values that seem to be guiding changes at their schools.⁸

Resistance, principled or otherwise, is rarely the opening salvo in teachers' attempts to uphold their professional responsibilities. Many of these chapters illustrate that teachers often begin by fulfilling the expectations expressed by their school leaders in policies. Teachers first enact strategies of negotiation and creative accommodation if they find that following the policies or mandates harms students, subverts learning, damages the profession, or is antithetical to the democratic purpose of public schools. When teachers engage in principled resistance, their actions usually come after failed attempts at dialogue or negotiation to resolve the conflict.⁹

Principled resistance, therefore, is a professional strategy of last resort, and one that may entail serious risk. Principled resistance may jeopardize teachers' standing in the profession and their communities, and may also threaten their livelihoods. In making their

professional commitments public, teachers may risk disparagement and conflict when others disagree with the principles that motivate their actions. Instances of principled resistance provide a unique opportunity to examine the core beliefs and commitments that teachers reveal through these resistant acts. As we will show in this volume, there is constancy in teachers' commitments to the well-being of their students, their profession, and the role of public schools in a democratic society. However, this constancy does not necessarily indicate consensus; these chapters illustrate that while principled resistance is often a collaborative action, the decision to undertake it can be contentious.

Teachers who engage in principled resistance are not acting alone, but in implied or actual solidarity with others through an appeal to ethics rooted in their practice. John Dewey explains, "What is learned and employed in an occupation having an aim and involving cooperation with others is moral knowledge, whether consciously so regarded or not. For it builds up a social interest and confers the intelligence needed to make that interest effective in practice."¹⁰ The teaching profession, like many other forms of work and life, constitutes a community of practice in which a group of practitioners share a common vocabulary and set of experiences. The members of this community recognize and share many fundamental goals and tenets that guide the profession. Yet they also need to continuously participate in self-critical communities of practice.¹¹ Philosopher of education Thomas F. Green calls common understandings of what constitutes good work "craft conscience."¹² Shared orientations toward good work provide the principles by which teachers recognize and assess their own and their colleagues' actions.

Linda Darling-Hammond has argued, "It is unethical for a teacher to conform to prescribed practices that are ultimately harmful to children. Yet that is what teachers are required to do

by policies that are pedagogically inappropriate to some or all of their students.”¹³ Principled resistance often points to a conflict between teachers who view themselves as professionals and those who would cast teachers as paid laborers. Barbara S. Stengel and Mary E. Casey explain that pedagogical responsibility entails judgment rooted in the thoughtful assessment and interpretation of policies and principles in particular situations: “[T]eaching is not merely a matter of adhering to prescribed strategies of instruction, nor is it merely enacting a predetermined philosophical vision in one’s classroom, nor is it merely exemplifying a set of pedagogical virtues—though strategies, visions, and virtues are among the teacher’s tools.”¹⁴ Pedagogical responsibility can be achieved only by granting teachers the moral and professional status to evaluate their work in light of their professional ideals or principles.

Teachers’ acts of principled resistance illuminate how they understand the fundamental responsibilities of teachers and the teaching profession. By maintaining the boundaries of their professional responsibilities to students and society, teachers make schools stronger when they demand that education policies align with the ideals of the teaching profession. Teachers take significant risks when they engage in principled resistance, and because they occupy a unique, privileged position in the classrooms of the United States, it is incumbent upon members of the public to give teachers’ acts and articulations of ethical concern full weight. As we face ongoing dilemmas in the reform of public schools, teachers’ resistance must be consulted for the principles that could guide our future actions.

The dilemmas that may evoke principled resistance threaten teachers’ understandings of good work—that is, they are dilemmas that invoke professional ethics. These dilemmas are in a class distinct from teaching’s more quotidian tensions, which include how to meet the needs of individuals versus the needs of the whole class, how to teach students in the present for an unknown future,

how to share knowledge while teaching students to be critical of knowledge, and how to care for and protect young people who are not one's own children. These dilemmas also raise ethical concerns, but on a different scale; asking these questions is part and parcel of good teaching. Our position is that principled resistance illustrates deeper and more troubling dilemmas rooted in the work of teaching that have the potential to threaten it as a profession; it is this destructive potential that teachers resist.

Although teaching is a value-laden profession where every choice made and action taken by teachers communicates a belief about what constitutes good teaching, teachers may give little conscious thought to the principles that guide their work. This indifference is not an indication that teachers are failing to take the proper philosophical attitude. Rather, as Dewey and other philosophers have argued, ethical deliberation is an exception to the rule. We are spurred into inquiry and reflection by tensions, dilemmas, and conflicts about what we are to do in a problematic situation.¹⁵

In times when we are torn between different courses of action, our principles, or guiding beliefs and core commitments, rise to the surface. Principles are not rules; they do not easily settle conflicts or make choices in moral situations straightforward. Dewey explains that “the object of moral principles is to supply standpoints and methods which will enable the individual to make for himself an analysis of the elements of good and evil in the particular situation in which he finds himself. No genuine moral principle prescribes a specific course of action.”¹⁶

Principles provide us with an opportunity to assess our past and current actions in light of the ideals we hope to embody. Dewey argues that articulating principles enables thoughtful action. He writes, “The principle is not what justifies an activity, for the principle is but another name for the continuity of the activ-

ity.”¹⁷ Examining principled resistance enables us to see more than the obvious fact that teachers possess principles about their work. We can also gain insight into the kind of teaching and schooling, the activity and its purpose, that they are trying to sustain.

About This Book

This book focuses on teachers’ principled resistance from the early twentieth century to the present. We selected contributors who could provide vivid examples of the pedagogical, professional, and democratic principles that may motivate teachers’ principled resistance. Each author offers a distinct perspective: teachers who reflect on their acts of principled resistance; teacher educators who study teachers and support their professional growth; historians who demonstrate that a tradition of teachers’ principled resistance has had a significant impact on American society, not only on schools and teaching.

Across the disciplinary perspectives of the contributors, each chapter in this volume exemplifies professional ethics in action. The authors uncover, render visible, and clarify the values that shape teachers’ work in situations of ethical dilemmas. The authors in this volume enable us to demystify why and how teachers engage in principled resistance by showing the steps they take, in their reasoning and in their actions, to resist policies and mandates they are expected to enact.

Readers will have an opportunity to examine a variety of ways to engage in and analyze principled resistance. The chapters are grouped according to the type of principle invoked by the resistance, but each case provides opportunities to consider how pedagogical, professional, and democratic principles may work in concert or be in conflict with one another. We invite readers, teachers especially, to examine their reactions to the examples in

this volume. Those reactions may yield important information about their own professional principles.

Chapters 1–4 focus on resistance rooted in pedagogical principles. In chapter 1, veteran Chicago public school teacher Michelle Strater Gunderson charts her individual resistance to the Common Core State Standards and how it became part of the collective resistance of the Chicago Teachers Union that emerged from pedagogical principles. The Chicago Teachers Union passed a resolution in opposition to the Common Core State Standards and launched a successful effort to bring it to the floor for debate at the annual convention of the American Federation of Teachers. This chapter provides insight into the strategies of a union local that used its collective power and influence to effect change in education policy and practice.

In chapter 2, teacher educator Clive Beck and his colleagues draw on a longitudinal study of early-career teachers to explore how and why teachers resist institutional and policy mandates. Their findings suggest that schools of education that teach critical, constructivist pedagogies may plant the seeds for principled resistance based on pedagogical principles. The authors recommend that teacher educators take responsibility for preparing their students to engage in principled resistance. The authors conclude that teacher resistance needs to be researched and documented by those less vulnerable than teachers (e.g., academics), thus informing teachers, teacher educators, and policy developers about its form, rationale, and impact.

Randy R. Miller, Sr. describes his principled resistance to no-excuses discipline in chapter 3. Comparing his tenure as a teacher in two Camden, New Jersey, charter schools, he highlights a moment when he could no longer uphold the no-excuses compliance expectations for students. Miller realized that principled resistance

was necessary to fulfill his pedagogical commitments to critical thinking and meeting students' needs. Ultimately, he was compelled to ask himself who or what would define him as an educator. Miller writes this chapter as an invitation to teachers of color to examine the beliefs that guide their identities as educators. His response embodies the paradox of conscientious objectors; he refused to violate the way students would be treated in his teaching practice, but that led him to leave his teaching position, where had been committed to serving Black and Brown students well.

Chapter 4 offers another perspective from teacher educators. Alisun Thompson and Lucinda Pease-Alvarez describe a powerful collaboration between teachers resisting a compliance-based work environment and university-based collaborators and researchers. The authors portray teachers as agents of educational policy. They study a teacher collective in Northern California that has resisted policies of standardization aimed at requiring them to teach and assess students in ways that ignore students' instructional needs, interests, and experiences. As members of the collective, the authors use participatory and ethnographic approaches to describe how teacher resistance and agency are implicated in the educational policy-making process. The history of this organization will be instructive for those who want to create synergies between experienced teachers and university-based teacher educators.

Chapters 5–8 focus on professional principles. In chapter 5, Emma Long chronicles the history of the lengthy and successful strike of New Orleans public school teachers in 1990. This strike illustrates the solidarity between certified teachers and the paraprofessionals and clerical workers that make their work possible. It also highlights the teachers' commitment to professional recognition for their lowest-paid coworkers. The teachers' oral accounts of this strike indicate that they organized a campaign to unseat

the school board based on strategies learned through their prior involvement in the civil rights movement. Long's chapter will be instructive to any teacher union planning to take a stand against its school board on matters of professional principles.

In chapter 6, Margaret Smith Crocco examines some of the dilemmas facing teacher education in three different states in which schooling and teacher preparation are being shaped by various neo-liberal reforms, particularly privatization. In this chapter, she notes that teacher education appears caught between forces advancing greater professionalization through regulation (e.g., Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) and those seemingly bent on de-professionalization (e.g., Teach for America and charter schools). She considers how to create hope and principled resistance in both teachers and teacher educators in the face of these challenges, especially through local alliances and online activism.

In chapter 7, Tom Meyer, Christine McCartney, and Jaqueline Hesse outline their process of helping teachers to articulate and make public their professional principles. The authors describe how they run a National Writing Project invitational institute that enables teachers to become more confident as they write for broader audiences and make their professional commitments known. Drawing on the writing of past participants, they show that workshops like these can develop teacher leadership that may include principled resistance.

In chapter 8, teacher Jocelyn Weeda analyzes her own act of principled resistance when she called upon families and their children to exercise their right to refuse high-stakes tests in her state. She describes how building and district administrators portrayed her principled resistance as an expression of personal beliefs, when she knew her motivations came from professional commitments. Weeda draws on her doctoral research in which she interviewed

other teachers engaged in principled resistance. She found that their resistance emanated from a sense of professional responsibility. When she could not find community in her building or support from her administration, the alliances Weeda had developed on social media provided her with support and solidarity during a very difficult time in her career.

Democratic principles are the focus of chapters 9–12. In chapter 9, Lizabeth Cain recounts the experience of New York City teachers during the second Red Scare, using archival research of their personal and public correspondence as well as their formal teaching evaluations. They were accused of “insubordination and conduct unbecoming a teacher” for refusing to respond to questions implicating them and their colleagues as Communists. Aware of the political climate, the teachers knew their principled resistance would cost them their jobs, but they also believed they had an important role to play as educators in a democracy. These teachers were determined to use their positions to speak out against antidemocratic policies.

Karen Graves and Margaret A. Nash undertake historical research in chapter 10, which traces the history of the court battles of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) teachers who demanded equal protection under the law. Since the Cold War, queer perceived/identified teachers in the United States have worked under strict public scrutiny. As the political terrain has shifted from gay purges to civil rights battles, LGBT teachers have adopted a number of strategies to maintain their jobs in elementary and secondary schools. In courtrooms stretching across the country, teachers and other school workers have taken public stands to challenge dismissals based on flawed claims of immorality, at great personal cost. At times these acts of principled resistance have resulted in legal steps toward equal employment protection for LGBT educators. They laid the foundation for the Supreme Court

decision on gay marriage, even as the individuals named in the cases were not able to reclaim their own jobs.

Adah Ward Randolph and Dwan V. Robinson describe the life of Ethel T. Overby in chapter 11. Overby, an early twentieth-century African American teacher and school principal, spurred her community to resist injustice through her work in schools and other community organizations. Overby leveraged her education and leadership to challenge segregated schools and libraries, and to help Black citizens to overcome hurdles to accessing literacy and exercising their democratic right to vote. The authors highlight Overby's resistance and describe how her educational philosophy and practices fostered democratic change in Richmond, Virginia.

In chapter 12, teacher educators Jessica Hochman, Doris A. Santoro, and Stephen Houser note that teachers have been exhorted to turn to Twitter to connect their classrooms with the world, at the same time that others are warned to stay off social media to express professional concerns. The authors explore both the tweeting practices of teachers and the content of teachers' tweets. They show that Twitter offers a democratic space where teachers can use their voices to shape the discourse about teaching, find professional community, and support each other in acts of principled resistance. Their study shows that Twitter can be a site of principled resistance, where teachers are able to circumvent and challenge dominant narratives of teaching and education policy.

We conclude this volume with some provocations about principled resistance. What gives teachers the moral or political authority to make the decision to resist? How can they, and others, distinguish between principled resistance and justified civil disobedience, on the one hand, and antidemocratic, insubordinate rejections of democratically adopted policies, on the other? What are the limits of teachers' principled resistance, especially in the face

of reforms financed by corporate entities with seemingly limitless budgets? What is the value of teachers' principled resistance if it might cost them their jobs? Most importantly, what responsibilities do we have to hear and heed the concerns of teachers, when they risk their jobs and reputations to bring attention to the erosion of schools as places where the highest principles of our society can take shape and expression?