

America's Armed Teachers: An Ethical Analysis

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by [Douglas Yacek](#) — 2018

Background: *In the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012, state legislatures considered a flurry of legislation that would allow school districts to arm their teachers. In at least 15 states such legislation has been signed into law. Parallel to these developments, a lively and at times strident public debate on the appropriateness of arming public school teachers has emerged in the media, especially as a result of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February 2018. Although the two sides of the debate offer illuminating insights into the pitfalls and promises of arming teachers, both tend to focus almost exclusively on the empirical issue of student safety. As a result, the public debate fails to address several central ethical issues associated with arming public school teachers. This article is an effort to pay these issues their due attention.*

Purpose: *The purpose of this article is to examine the ethical implications of arming public school teachers. Specifically, the article analyzes three intersecting domains relevant to the ethics of armed teachers: children's rights, educational environments, and the problem of school violence. In doing so, this article seeks to make clear what is morally and educationally at stake when adopting security policies such as arming teachers. Generalizing from this analysis, the article concludes with a deliberative heuristic for educators and policy makers who would like to address school security in a humane and ethically responsible way.*

Research Design: *The design of this research conforms to the standards of ethical inquiry and argumentation in education. The article draws heavily on arguments and observations made by teachers, administrators, and educational commentators in the public sphere; state and federal legislation; research in social psychology, psychology, and sociology; and ethical theory.*

Conclusions: *The main conclusion resulting from this analysis is that the ethical grounds for arming teachers lack merit. The first half of the article argues that the empirical idiom in which the public debate is often carried out obscures important ethical issues concerning students' perceptions of safety and the integrity of the school learning environment. In particular, I show that both sides have overlooked the ways in which armed teachers can undermine students' developmental rights—i.e., their rights to an autonomy-promoting civic education. The second half of the article argues that armed protection transforms the role of both the teacher and student such that the conditions of democratic teaching and learning are seriously endangered. In the final sections, the argument turns to the issue of public fear surrounding school violence and concludes that efforts to prevent school violence may be counterproductive, especially when they are not coupled with larger-scale socioeconomic reforms.*

INTRODUCTION

On January 17, 2013, House Bill 1087 was presented before the South Dakota House of Representatives. HB 1087 proposed to allow South Dakota school districts to introduce a new kind of safety official, the so-called "school sentinel," into their public schools. Although school resource officers have been patrolling South Dakota's public school hallways for decades, the new school sentinels would differ from these familiar officials in one crucial respect. School sentinels can be "school employees, hired security personnel, or volunteers"; they need not be trained police officers (South Dakota House of Representatives, 2013). HB 1087 sanctions armed teachers.

HB 1087's proposal to allow armed teachers and other school staff into public schools, though alarming, is not an uncommon one in the aftermath of the prominent shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February 2018 and Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012. In a report issued in 2014, the Council of State Governments observed that more than 80 bills relating to arming teachers or other school staff were submitted to state legislatures in 2013 alone. A proposed Alabama bill, for example, authorizes schools to create "volunteer emergency forces" composed of current and retired employees and local citizens to patrol their halls. A Texas bill does the same, opting for the fitting term "school marshals." Legislation in Kansas allows employees to arm themselves if they have a "special permit" from the local police chief. Finally, a bill in Tennessee welcomes armed personnel if they have had 40 hours of training and use frangible bullets.¹

The idea of arming teachers has not only remained a topic of deliberation in state legislative

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nouses, however. Each of the bills just mentioned, with the exception of the Alabama bill, have been signed into law. At least 15 states now allow teachers to come to class armed, and many more state legislatures are considering bills to follow suit.² Kasey Hansen, a special education teacher in Utah, rose to fame in 2014 for the pink handgun she brought with her to class and which she has christened “Lucy” (Murphey, 2014). A few weeks earlier, Argyle High School in suburban North Texas put itself on the map for the sign it introduced to the school’s front lawn that reads: “Please be aware that the staff at Argyle ISD are armed and may use whatever force is necessary to protect our students” (“Sign at TX school,” 2014). The Keene school district, just an hour south of Argyle, voted not only to allow armed teachers but also to provide them with the guns (Hawkins, 2015). And in Ohio, the Buckeye Firearms Association graduated its first class of 24 educators from a three-day “Armed Teacher Training Program” on March 28, 2013. The program received more than 600 applications (“Ohio firearms group,” 2013).

While the phenomenon of armed teachers has received substantial attention from news outlets and bloggers in the media, the ethical issues associated with arming teachers have been given short shrift, and educational researchers have not yet paid the phenomenon much attention.³ Because, from one perspective, the ethical illegitimacy of a weaponized teacher workforce seems almost self-evident, it is tempting to collapse the phenomenon into larger sociopolitical developments plaguing American public education and to condemn the practice on these grounds. Arming teachers seems just one more example, and a particularly worrisome one, of the increasing intensification of school security (Addington, 2009), the extension of zero-tolerance violence reduction policies (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010), and the so-called War Against the Youth (Giroux, 2003). From another perspective, however, arming teachers can be seen as the next logical step in the pursuit of violence-free schools, justified by the same ethical reasoning as that which supports the armed security personnel who have patrolled school hallways since before the 1999 Columbine High School shooting.

Although both of these perspectives are right to contextualize the phenomenon of armed teachers within the social, political, and educational conditions that have made it a plausible response to school violence, they are insufficient by themselves. If the ethical legitimacy of arming teachers is not assessed on its own terms, we are likely to overlook the qualitative differences between it and the adoption of other school security measures, and will thus find ourselves ill equipped to address the specific arguments for and against arming teachers that have been advanced in the public debate. The issue of armed teachers has engendered a highly polarized discussion in the media, the voices of which have actively sought to effect rapid changes in U.S. school security policy. Unfortunately, the debate about arming teachers continues to overlook many of the moral complexities involved with the policy. Discussion circles vertiginously around the question of whether arming teachers actually increases students’ safety. While there is no doubt that students’ safety is central to evaluating the moral legitimacy of armed teachers, the facts that (1) students’ *perception* of safety is just as morally relevant as their actual safety in educational contexts, (2) students’ right to safety can compete with their developmental right to an autonomy-promoting education, (3) autonomy-promoting education presupposes a necessary, and therefore desirable, element of risk, and (4) students’ and educators’ perceptions of safety are as much psychosocial constructions demanding of interrogation as they are affects to be taken at face value—these facts are ignored by the parties of the contemporary debate. When taken into consideration, however, the proposal to arm U.S. teachers shows itself to be an intricate moral problem with far-reaching consequences for students’ educational experiences and the American public school.

In this essay, I examine the various arguments for and against armed teachers that have been advanced in the public sphere—first in their own terms, and second from the standpoint of students’ rights. I engage with public arguments for several reasons. First, some of the points made by both sides of the debate are compelling and demanding of attention. To bring these points into the discussion is to take seriously the lived experience of educators, parents, and other stakeholders. Second, the debate about armed teachers, though instructive, is flawed in important ways. Namely, the empirical idiom in which the debate is often carried out clouds the cultural values that are actually driving it and thus distracts from the serious ethical deliberation required for progress to be made. The debate’s exclusive focus on student safety obscures the influence armed teachers unavoidably exert on the public school’s ability to realize its more substantive democratic aims. Because students are entitled to expect schools to pursue these aims, I discuss arming teachers with respect to children’s rights, showing that armed teachers negatively impact the school’s ability to cultivate students’ civic virtue and autonomy, if the introduction of armed teachers decreases students’ perception of safety.

This conditional result does not conclude the analysis, however; for even in the case that armed teachers increase students’ perception of safety, there are still moral costs associated

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with their use. To get at these costs, I next discuss the way in which armed protection encourages teachers and students to adopt the roles of protector/protected, enforcer/threat, and state agent/subject at the expense of more egalitarian and dialogical roles. Furthermore, I argue that these subject frames undercut teachers' pedagogical flexibility, a defining characteristic of democratic education. In the penultimate section, I inquire into the sources of fear that have given rise to the issue of armed teachers in the first place, and in conclusion, I recommend a deliberative heuristic for educators and policy makers who would like to address school security in a humane and ethically responsible way. In other words, when students believe their environment to be less safe as a result of the presence of armed teachers, the measure has undermined their civic education, an education to which students have a right and which we have a duty to provide.

TO ARM OR NOT TO ARM

The public debate on arming teachers is often construed as an opposition between proponents and detractors of armed teachers. It seems as if we must make a choice: to arm or not to arm. However, there is a variety of positions one can defend regarding the question of arming teachers. In its most basic form, the debate consists of four positions. One could argue that all teachers should be armed, that only a carefully selected few should be, that teachers should be given the choice to arm themselves, or that no teachers should be armed. One could argue for armed teachers but against teachers having easy access to their guns. Alternatively, one could contend that only "off-duty" teachers should have guns, that guns should remain concealed or unconcealed, that they should be of a certain, more or less lethal type, or that guns should only be carried outside the classroom. Or, one could contend that teachers should be armed with weapons besides guns—from self-defense and nonviolent communication techniques to pepper spray, tasers, or batons. Finally, one could even argue that both teachers *and* students should be armed.

Unfortunately, the public debate on armed teachers fails to attain this nuance. This is problematic for two reasons. First, the arguments that position themselves against arming teachers prove less than they hope to. Second, the arguments for arming teachers fail to specify the conditions under which it may or may not be appropriate for teachers to be armed.

Let's take a look at the arguments against armed teachers that have been defended in the public debate first. There are three that continually reappear: the competence argument ("Arming Teachers, n.d.; Kusnetz, 2013; Richmond, 2013; Ripley, 2013), the resources argument (Whitaker, 2013), and the "more guns, more problems" argument (ibid.; Ripley, 2013).⁴

According to the competence argument, teachers do not have the professional expertise to be effective respondents to violent crises within the school. Teachers' professional training prepares them to be nurturers and educators. Responding to violent crises requires a different professional identity altogether, one that is authoritative, quick-acting, and unyielding. A teacher whose job it is to care for students rather than command them, to engage in dialogue rather than issue decrees, and to be an inexhaustible resource of forgiveness and understanding will hesitate when the time comes to combat a violent student.⁵ Even if this identity-shift were possible, the techniques required to neutralize violent crimes are learned only through rigorous training in law enforcement and years of experience. It is unrealistic to expect this kind of preparation in teachers, who are burdened enough as it is. Therefore, teachers should not be armed.

According to the resources argument, the expenditure that would be required to train teachers to a level that renders them safe and effective protectors of the school would be prohibitively large. These funds, even if they were not exorbitant, would be better used to address the root causes of school violence—improvements in mental health facilities, for example—or should be allocated to schools' more basic needs such as those for books, technology, increasing teacher salaries, or reducing class sizes. Schools should use what financial resources they have for basic needs and addressing root causes of violence rather than sophisticated gun-protection techniques. Therefore, teachers should not be armed.

Finally, according to the "more guns, more problems" argument, the school environment simply becomes less safe as guns are added to it. Teachers may accidentally discharge the weapon in breaking up a fight; they may falsely judge a student to be a violent threat and shoot; they may correctly judge such a situation, yet misfire and injure other students; they

may resort to intimidation if they lose control of a classroom; or they may be more inclined to commit suicide when under stress with a gun easily accessible. The increase in probability of accidental death and the tension created by the presence of guns gives rise to a generally unsafe and intimidating atmosphere. Therefore, teachers should not be armed.

While none of these arguments is completely successful on its own terms, all of them contribute important perspectives to the ethical analysis of armed teachers. The competence argument brings up the issue of the role of the teacher and its potential incompatibility with the role of weaponized protector. Although this is a powerful premise, we should grant that effective gun training for teachers is at least *possible*, as the resources argument does. The resources argument addresses the issue of the proper use of school funds, an important concern given that public dollars are implicated. The usual response, however, is that the safety of students must be protected regardless of expense, and one way of doing this is to train teachers to be safe and effective protectors of students. Finally, while the final argument is highly plausible, it is incomplete as it stands. There are many ways that teachers may be “armed” that can mitigate the real danger they present—e.g., in limiting access to the guns or decreasing the lethality of the weapon. Moreover, proper training may bring this threat to a negligible level. The reference to the “intimidating atmosphere” that an armed teacher may create brings up the crucial question of the gun’s effect on school climate, but unfortunately the argument leaves this phenomenon unexamined. While it is likely that at least some of the violence in schools results from the “tension” created by security measures like armed teachers, it is also possible that their presence could be a reassurance to students worried about school violence.

Let’s now consider the arguments for armed teachers. As mentioned, there is a great variety of positions to be defended regarding the practice. However, only one position is seriously considered in the public debate. Namely, teachers should have the choice to arm themselves or not, some should choose in favor of arming themselves, and their weapons should be concealed and lethal. There are two arguments that are usually presented for this position. The first can be called the deterrent argument (Hawkins, 2015); the second the “only a good guy with a gun can stop a bad guy with a gun” argument (Moody, 2014; Siebold, 2013).

According to the deterrent argument, the presence of armed teachers in the school building will deter violent attacks on the school. Potential criminals will think twice about carrying out their crimes in a school where they know teachers are packing heat. Not only will they think twice; they will choose not to carry out the attack, at least some of the time. Every deterred attack means that the lives of children have been saved, and it is negligence of the most extreme kind not to take a measure that can save students’ lives. Therefore, teachers should be armed.

According to the “only a good guy with a gun can stop a bad guy with a gun” argument, law enforcement simply cannot be depended on to react in time to violent attacks—whether because of police inefficiency, or the inevitable fact that police can respond only so quickly. The same is true of school resource officers. They can patrol only so much ground, and they are sure to be the first targets in a school shooting. Only well-trained, armed teachers in school classrooms can effectively prevent these heinous crimes. It is wrong to leave children defenseless against violent intruders, who have no qualms about breaking school gun policy when they come to shoot up the place. Therefore, teachers should be armed.

Both of these arguments, while flawed, make compelling appeals to common sense that we should take seriously. Regarding the first, it is highly plausible that the presence of armed teachers would be a deterrent. In fact, it is hard to imagine that it would not be. However, the weakness of this first argument is revealed when we inquire into *which types of criminals* such a measure would likely deter.

There are two main ways in which a criminal can be deterred from a crime—directly or indirectly. An example of direct deterrence would be a case in which a potential criminal, while thinking over his or her crime, is reminded of the threat to his or her life that the deterrence measure poses—in our case the armed teacher. For the deterrence measure to succeed, this informal risk assessment would have to yield a result that is so psychologically disturbing that the criminal would be moved to overcome his or her desire to carry out the crime (see Kleck, 1996 pp. 15–16). An example of indirect deterrence would be a case in which the presence of armed teachers creates a school environment or culture that sends the implicit message, “We don’t tolerate crime here.” If this message is sent early and often enough, then the environment can deter crime *before* it is ever planned or conceived.

From these two types of deterrence we can derive some basic psychological qualities that a criminal must possess in order to be deterred by armed teachers. Armed teachers serve as a direct deterrent when the criminal is, like most people, acting from at least semi-rational, risk-averse motivations and is in possession of considerable self-control. If the criminal's mental state has rendered him or her less able or indifferent to assessing risk, has fixated him or her on the thought of destruction, or has grown out of such extreme emotional damage that he or she feels compelled to vengeance, then it is unlikely that the armed teacher will serve as a direct deterrent. The same goes for indirect deterrence. If the criminal is suffering from severe emotional disturbances or mental health problems, these are likely to be much "louder" messages than the ones armed teachers send. In fact, armed teachers may encourage rather than deter the criminal's motivations if he or she sees them as more "evidence" of the school's hostility or corruption.

Unfortunately, the psychological profile of actual school shooters does not match up with the profile of criminals likely to be deterred by armed teachers. The perpetrators of school shootings are often motivated by intense, deep-seated animosities that have festered over years of feeling maltreated and alienated, and they often suffer from a severe incapacity to care for the fate of others.⁶ In addition, more and more shooters long for the media attention their violent outburst will inevitably attract (Fast, 2008; Warnick, Kim, & Robinson, 2015). In such a state, perpetrators lack the psychological resources to control themselves either on the basis of a sober risk assessment or in light of the school's no-tolerance policy on crime. With such individuals, the presence of armed personnel is more likely to lead them to create increasingly sophisticated plans of attack than to deter them. The incident at Columbine, where armed school resource officers were on duty, is a tragic case in point. Moreover, potential criminals are not likely to be deterred by the physical threat of armed teachers. The most destructive shooters carry multiple firearms, of great lethality, and often plan to take their own lives if they are not killed in an ensuing shootout.

The armed teacher proponent is not likely to be convinced by this argument. Sure, armed teachers may not deter *all* potential criminals from shooting up a school, but if they have deterred just one potential criminal, or deescalated just one incident, then hasn't the measure proven itself? Isn't the life of just one child worth all of the expenditure, training, and procedural changes associated with arming teachers?

This appeal to common sense is almost identical to the one made in the second argument for arming teachers, the "only a good guy with a gun can stop a bad guy with a gun" argument. Quite simply, if we put in place gun policies that disallow the presence of armed teachers in schools, then we put children's lives in the unreliable hands of local law enforcement or school resource officers if a violent crisis occurs. There is always a chance that such crises will occur, however small, and not arming teachers renders children defenseless until help arrives.⁷ This is a brute fact that the armed teacher detractor simply must accept.

However, accepting this brute fact and accepting the commonsense appeals of the two arguments are not logically equivalent. These arguments assume without evidence, for example, that introducing armed teachers into schools does actually make the school environment safer than it would be without them. The "more guns, more problems" argument asserts the opposite. Which side has it right?

Thus it seems that the ethical discussion turns on this all-important empirical question. Does the presence of armed teachers actually increase or decrease students' safety at school? This is the question that preoccupies the public debate. To answer it directly, extensive empirical information is required. One crucial piece of data would be a representative sample of K-12 schools that employ armed teachers and that have witnessed a statistically significant change in school safety. Additionally, it would have to be shown that this change cannot be accounted for by other known factors instigating or preventing school violence. In order to establish this conclusion, multiple experiments would have to be carried out. Because community and demographic factors figure strongly in predicting school violence, these experiments would be generalizable in only a limited sense. They would therefore have to be performed for particular states, districts, and even schools.

The problem here is that this data is lacking and there are important ethical constraints on collecting such data. We cannot, as one commentator has morbidly suggested (Rostron, 2014, p. 453), conduct real-life experiments to see how many more students or staff are

injured or killed when armed teachers are employed than when they are not. Thus we are left with addressing the safety question indirectly. In the absence of direct empirical evidence, some detractors of armed teachers refer to the inherent dangers of students' exposure to guns (Mrowka & Busser, n.d.), while others argue that the absence of data constitutes a good reason not to introduce armed teachers into schools (Nance, Krummel, Oldham, FACS, & the Trauma Committee of the American Pediatric Surgical Association, 2013, p. 944).

Although this latter argument is fallacious as it stands, its suggestion is the most promising. Because the arming of teachers entails dramatic changes to school security procedures and carries with it obvious dangers, the burden of proof is on proponents to provide convincing grounds for believing the measure will increase safety. If, in addition, the armed teacher detractor can show by means of data from analogous situations that we have good reason to expect a detrimental impact on student safety resulting from the presence of armed teachers, then the proponent's position will be severely weakened. To take this analogical approach, the safety question must be resolved into two more precise ones: How might the armed teacher affect student safety under normal circumstances? How effective should we expect the armed teacher to be in the case of a violent attack?

The former question can be addressed first by shifting the geographical context of the armed teacher. Are there data on the effects of armed teachers in the schools of other countries? While the phenomenon of armed teachers is not confined to the United States—Israel and Pakistan have recently gained publicity for weaponizing some of their teachers (Khan, 2015; Tepper, 2012)—school safety data surrounding their employment are lacking in these cases as well. Although no argument by analogy can therefore be made here, it is instructive to note that armed teachers have been employed only in countries beleaguered by inter-ethnic violence. That these political situations are strongly disanalogous to the American context calls into question the necessity of armed teachers in U.S. schools. Countries with political situations more akin to ours, which employ neither armed teachers nor even fully armed police patrols, e.g., Ireland and England, only provide further impetus against arming teachers.

Another relevant situation can be generated if we shift the social context away from the school and consider an environment in which gun-carriers possess comparable levels of firearm training to that of an armed teacher and interact regularly with children, i.e., a gun-owning household. Here the armed teacher proponent position is weakened again, this time by the alarming statistics surrounding accidental firearm deaths among children. Children born into households in states with the highest household gun ownership rates—Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and West Virginia—are *16 times* more likely to be the victim of unintentional firearm death than children in states with the lowest household gun ownership rates (Miller, Azrael, & Hemenway, 2002, p. 272). A similar figure may characterize students' risk in schools if armed teachers do not have much better firearm training than the average household owner. Another study shows that it is not only students who are at risk when teachers have guns. Data from non-self-defense firearm discharges by teachers between 1980 and 2012 show that they most often use their weapons against significant others (31%), followed by school administrators (20%) and other teachers (17%). In 60% of these cases, teachers used the gun to commit suicide, but in only one case was the gun discharged accidentally, and no students were victimized (Buck, Yurvati, & Drake, 2013). Because the study did not compare these figures to teachers' uses of firearms in self-defense, however, the most we can conclude from it is that when teachers use their guns irresponsibly, their victims are diverse.

Finally, the question of the armed teacher's probable effectiveness in a violent attack should be addressed. The most suggestive example for doing so would be to look at the effectiveness of police officers in similar scenarios. The statistics are disheartening. A Rand study of the New York City Police Department carried out between 1998 and 2006 revealed that police officers in shoot-out situations involving return fire hit their target just 18% of the time. When there was no return fire the hit rate was not much better: 30% (Rostker et al.,

2008). *Time* reporter Amanda Ripley's (2013) compelling account of the harrowing emotional and cognitive turmoil that impairs the ability of even highly trained police officers to act effectively in shoot-out scenarios further impugns the armed teacher proponent's position.

Given the weight of these arguments, one might wonder why the public debate on armed teachers has continued to rage on. Has one side of the debate simply lost touch with empirical reality? Unfortunately, the issue is not so simple.⁸ For each of the statistics I have referenced, another persuasive statistic can be, and often is, marshalled as evidence for the

opposing argument. The armed teacher proponent points to the alarming rate of violent crime in the United States compared to other developed countries, the increasing number of mass shootings, the ratio of successful self-defense usages of guns to accidents in households with safe gun-storage practices, and the number of crimes neutralized by gun-toting civilians. Thus the public debate comes to an impasse, and the argumentative approach taken there becomes untenable. If, as it appears, each side is selecting statistical information simply to bolster its point and weaken the other side, having formulated its position *prior* to the use of statistics, then statistical arguments are almost certainly doomed to fail. In fact, they are likely only to exacerbate the strife and misunderstanding that has come to characterize the larger gun control debate.⁹

What kind of argument is likely to succeed, then? To answer this question, we first need to find out the actual driving force behind the public debate. If the search for an accurate statistical depiction of reality is not really at issue, what is? Consider the states in which legislation to arm teachers has recently passed: South Dakota, Texas, Kansas, and Tennessee. Each of these states is home to a culture in which the gun plays a prominent and positive symbolic role. Consider, too, that demographic factors such as race, religion, and gender have been shown to be stronger predictors of attitudes toward gun control than anything else (Kleck, 1996, p. 387) and cultural values to have "a bigger impact on gun control attitudes than does *any* other demographic variable" (Kahan & Braman, 2003, p. 1307). These facts point to a crucial idiosyncrasy of the gun control debate—namely, the primacy of *values* over statistics in the taking of sides. Although the armed teachers debate is steeped in references to empirical data and preoccupied with the question of children's actual safety, it seems that the values the two sides associate with gun-possession and American public schools are the true basis of disagreement. Thus, an ethical argument is required to mediate the disagreement, not an empirical one.¹⁰

The armed teacher proponent's typical rejoinder to the empirical arguments above demonstrates this point clearly. The armed teacher proponent elides the empirical question altogether and responds, plausibly, that it is precisely the rigorous training that teachers would undergo that ensures that the school environment is in fact safer than it would be without them. This rejoinder successfully shifts the discussion away from the empirical and demands an ethical rebuttal. In effect, it forces us to consider whether there is still something the matter with introducing armed teachers into schools *even if* we were sure that students' safety were thereby increased.

In order to make progress in the public discussion, I think it is best to grant this assumption—that is, the claim that introducing armed teachers into public schools, with proper training, does actually increase student safety, or at least does not further endanger it.¹¹ Although we can concede at least this much, the foregoing arguments can still inform our expectations of how difficult the implementation of such a training program would be. Because the training program must prepare teachers with not only impeccable marksmanship and tactical expertise but also the emotional fortitude required to act effectively in the face of the harrowing prospect of their own and their students' death, it must be comprehensive, recurring, and long. The 3-day teacher firearms training program put on by the Buckeye Firearm Association is clearly insufficient, as is the 40-hour training course required by the Texas and Tennessee bills.¹² In addition to rigorous training for teachers, schools must put in place a comprehensive bureaucratic apparatus to ensure that guns are maintained, stored, tracked, and carried properly and that all training is kept up to date. These facts are crucial to keep in mind for determining the ethical implications of arming teachers (and they are addressed explicitly in the section following the next).

Although the demands such a program makes of teachers and the school are extensive, to dismiss it out of hand would be to refuse to address the philosophical issue informing the debate. The philosophical question that this final "training argument" raises is the following: To what extent do armed teachers change, or potentially disrupt, the educational environment of the public school? The training argument answers this question tacitly—namely, by assuming that the armed teacher's effect on these conditions is negligible. This assumption demands interrogation. Conceding that armed teachers, with proper training, make the school environment safer does not decide the issue of arming teachers. While the protection of students' safety is undoubtedly *one* of the central duties of the school, it has many others—like the promotion of intellectual autonomy and the cultivation of civic virtue—the fulfillment of which students are *entitled* to expect. To see how armed teachers affect the school's the fulfillment of these duties, it will therefore be necessary to inquire into what exactly children are entitled to in educational contexts—that is, into their rights.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION

Although the two sides of the armed teacher debate seem to present the conclusion that both

Although the two sides of the armed teacher debate come to opposite conclusions, they both take for granted that students have a robust right to safety. Students, both sides agree, are entitled to the constant vigilance of teachers and staff as well as substantial and recurring expenses for building upgrades, safety technology, counseling and mentoring services, and the periodic rehearsal of lockdown procedures. The armed teacher proponent adds to this list the extensive changes to school management procedures that the safe introduction of armed teachers would necessitate. Mall-goers do not receive such treatment. So why should students?

Children are generally thought to have two kinds of rights. The first, referred to as “welfare rights” because they protect children’s fundamental interests in their own welfare, include the rights to physical and emotional health, education, and safety (Brighouse, 2002). Children’s welfare right to safety in schools is particularly robust because they are not given the same choice to opt out of attending school as they are to opt out of, say, going to the mall (Warnick, 2007, p. 318). Children are therefore entitled to extensive protection of their safety while at school.

The second kind of rights that children possess are called “developmental rights” (ibid., p. 323) or “rights to an open future” (Feinberg, 1980). These rights grow out of the same rationale that grounds the inclusion of “education” in the list of welfare rights. Children are developing human beings. Their future ability to make significant life choices and participate meaningfully in democratic processes depends intimately on the education they receive. Such choices require a degree of intellectual autonomy and civic virtue that children do not yet have and that must be cultivated through education. Autonomy is the foundation on which students’ later “liberty rights” rest, rights we consider fundamental to democratic citizenship like those that protect speech, voting, and religious expression (Archard, 2014). Because these constitutional rights are defended by members on both sides of the political spectrum, the protection of children’s developmental rights constitutes an important bipartisan educational aim. The school, we can agree, should engage in those activities that cultivate students’ autonomy and civic skills and abolish those that stifle them.

It is important to distinguish between welfare and developmental rights when considering educational policy because often the two conflict. Deciding whether an action is justified in a school context is always a balancing act between these two fundamental kinds of rights. Warnick’s (2007) ethical analysis of surveillance cameras in schools is a case in point. Surveillance cameras can protect students’ right to safety by giving school officials the opportunity to intervene in dangerous situations that would typically be hidden from view. However, when students are under surveillance, they are less likely to act authentically and spontaneously, conforming to the behaviors they know to be within expectations. Surveillance cameras can therefore simultaneously infringe upon students’ developmental right to privacy. In other words, the same security policy, camera surveillance, can both protect the welfare right to safety and infringe upon the developmental right to privacy (Warnick, 2007, p. 321). Using surveillance cameras in schools is fraught with moral tension.

The same is true of armed teachers. Clearly the armed teacher, assuming she has extensive training and perfectly executes mandated safety precautions, stands to protect students’ welfare right to safety. The case becomes more complicated in light of students’ developmental rights, however. The question is whether arming teachers somehow gets in the way of cultivating students’ autonomy or civic virtue.

One way that armed teachers could do this is by creating the “intimidating atmosphere” that was mentioned in the “more guns, more problems” argument. The introduction of a gun to the classroom environment may lend student-teacher interactions a certain “edge” which they had not had previously. Impulsive behavior that transgresses established rules is no longer merely grounds for detention but a potential cause of an assault with a weapon. Contradicting the teacher or momentarily losing composure could have similarly gruesome results, no matter how unlikely the teacher’s training has rendered it.¹³ Even if the weapon is never discharged, the looming danger may therefore cause students to consciously or unconsciously censor their conduct, or it may have the opposite effect, making students more likely to respond to normal instances of stress with aggression, a phenomenon known in social psychology as the “weapons effect” (Anderson, Benjamin, & Bartholow, 1998).¹⁴ In either case, students are dissuaded from acting authentically and spontaneously. Moreover, students’ feeling of uneasiness may become a palpable fear that danger is always imminent and that their fellow classmates pose this danger. Security technologies like metal detectors and school resource officers have been shown to have precisely this effect on students (Bachman, Randolph, & Brown, 2011). This fear can be debilitating, just as the humiliation involved in being labeled a threat by one’s peers can be. When students are constrained in these ways, the development

threat by one's peers can be. When students are constrained in these ways, the development of their autonomy is compromised.

Interestingly, what matters for this argument is not students' actual safety, but their perception of safety. This observation, consistently overlooked in the public debate, has two important consequences. If students do in fact perceive that their environment is rendered less safe because of the presence of armed teachers, then this counts as an infraction of their developmental rights. This infraction may be justified, of course, if there is an immediate danger present, but it requires justification in all other circumstances. On the other hand, if students have normalized the presence of guns, perhaps because the use of guns is a common part of their lives, then it seems that no infraction of their developmental rights has occurred.

Students will differ as to whether they perceive the presence of armed teachers to be constraining or freeing. This perception can result from personal beliefs; it can be a product of their relationship with the teacher; or it can be conditioned by one's home culture, class, and race. For example, the history of police brutality perpetrated against the African American community may lead African American children to see their armed teachers as hostile forces rather than helping civic servants. This is particularly troubling, as some research suggests that African American children generally value their relationship to teachers higher than students of other races do (Ferguson, 2007, p. 128). Yet armed teachers may also be perceived as a stabilizing force in schools that are plagued with violence, schools in which African American children are overrepresented. It would thus be too difficult to predict merely on the basis of demographic factors how students would react if they knew that their teachers were armed. At the very least, school administrators should investigate, through either direct

interviews or indirect surveying, how their students might perceive their safety in the presence of armed teachers. Even in culturally and racially homogenous communities, the administrator is likely to find that some of his or her students will be rendered more fearful, and some less.

The presence of the armed teacher clearly has the potential to negatively impact the cultivation of students' autonomy, then. The same goes for the development of students' civic virtue. Political philosophers regularly debate about the contents and proper conceptualization of civic virtue, but many agree that it roughly entails a series of interpersonal and deliberative skills necessary for political engagement and a slew of basic attitudes toward political action in general. These attitudes include a commitment to democratic means for expressing one's political will, willingness to cooperate with others in common projects, responsiveness toward people of different cultural and racial backgrounds, and the resolve to trust one's fellow citizens. The armed teacher can undermine the cultivation of such attitudes in several ways. First, the presence of the armed teacher can be understood as a clear sign that one's fellow citizens cannot be trusted. This, in turn, can discourage cultivating the spirit of cooperation that is necessary for civic engagement. Furthermore, the presence of the armed teacher can send the message that we cannot place our confidence in state institutions like the police to protect us and that our protection is our own concern. Finally, the presence of armed teachers can communicate that brute force is the only way to express our interests rather than open dialogue and deliberation.

Again, whether these messages are sent is a matter of perception and individual difference. However, it is difficult to imagine that armed teachers would not impact the development of civic virtue in *some* significant way. In order to protect students' developmental rights, teachers and administrators should make a concerted effort to understand just how the presence of armed teachers will do so.

One might respond that both of these arguments conclude too much. All that follows from the salience of students' perception of safety for the protection of their developmental rights is that students should be kept in the dark about whether their teachers are armed or not, as is the case in Utah. We often withhold information from students for their own good—when we leave out the lurid details of a recent teacher firing, for example. Arming teachers might be an ideal case to do so because it would seem to circumvent the problem of perceived danger.

This objection is difficult to meet with the conceptual resources of welfare and developmental rights. We might want to respond that students have a right to know if their lives are potentially at risk. However, it is difficult to find a principled reason why this right should trump the developmental right that supports leaving children in the dark, especially when the risk is quite low. In any case, I think the search for such a reason is misguided. For it is not clear that we

should arm teachers even if we find that students would feel safer in their presence. That is, armed teachers may make students actually safer, and they may even make them feel safer, yet their presence may still affect the democratic learning environment in an ethically illegitimate way. Actual safety and students' perception of safety are not the only relevant considerations for assessing the ethical legitimacy of arming teachers. These other considerations are the topic of the next section.

TEACHERS AS PROTECTORS AND ENFORCERS

To understand how arming teachers may be ethically illegitimate without referring to students' actual or perceived safety, we must first focus our attention on the particular details of armed protection itself. The first detail to consider is the gun. Guns have tremendous power—physical, cultural, and political power. They are designed to kill, and do so efficiently. They confer on their holder a degree of control that is impossible to ignore and emblemize a certain political ideology in the American culture wars. In countless movies, TV shows, comics, and novels they represent the “virtues” of command, invincibility, vigilante justice, and even heroism. Guns have so much power that their safe use in schools demands, as their proponents point out, the rigorous training of those who would carry them. This training is just one part of an extensive organizational apparatus that would be required to ensure that the guns are carried by the right people, at the right time, and in the right way. Strict usage guidelines, sign-in/out procedures, training schedules, communication standards, tracking and surveillance systems, maintenance plans, work processes, and personnel role charts all need to be established so that the power of guns is used for good.

Another way of saying this is to assert that guns have politics. Not only do guns have political status as artifacts in the American culture wars, but as Langdon Winner pointed out, “some kinds of technology require their social environments to be structured in a particular way. . . . The thing could not exist as an effective [or safe] operating entity unless certain social as well as material conditions [are] met” (Winner, 2014, p. 674). This contradicts the commonsense notion that guns are neutral technologies that, in the words of one commentator in the debate, “can be used to do bad things, and . . . can be used to do good things” (Rostron, 2014, p. 454). While this is true if guns are considered in abstraction from the cultural and political contexts in which they are used, it is irrelevant when considering educational policy. For the purposes of educational policy, we must carefully consider the “requirements” that the gun makes of the social environment of the school. What happens to the role of the teacher when she is engaged in armed protection? How does this role-shift alter the environment of teaching and learning? In what ways might these changes conflict with the educational mission of the public school?

Let's first consider the requirements that armed protection makes of the teacher herself.¹⁵ These requirements begin before the armed teacher has even entered the school building. Looking through her wardrobe in the early morning hours, the teacher picks out clothing loose enough to hide the holster that will be harnessed to her body. When she gets to school, she checks in at the front desk, inspects her weapon in a private locker room, tightens the holster to her body, shudders slightly at the cold metal that presses against her skin, and steps into the buzzing hallway. Scanning the scene, she waves to students in her afternoon class and answers occasional questions from students walking by, just like any teacher would. But unlike the other teachers, she has to forego hugs and high-fives. Close bodily contact may reveal, or accidentally discharge, her weapon. The armed teacher also sees her surroundings a bit differently than she had before. As she learned in her training, she makes sure to find the hallway's closest exit routes and to rehearse hypothetically what an evacuation would look like. Other questions occur to her more spontaneously. Is the shouting in the hallway a harmless exchange, or a dangerous altercation that requires intervention? Is the metal object the student further down the hall is pulling out of his backpack a hole-puncher, or could it be a weapon? What was that loud sound? Did someone drop a book? Did a balloon burst? Was a shot fired? Luckily, the teacher's training has taught her to distinguish the various sounds that popular handguns make when fired, so such questions occur to her but do not lead to any immediate action. When the armed teacher enters her classroom, things calm down for her. Her well-managed classroom runs smoothly, and she can almost imagine that everything is as it always was. But each time she reaches up to write on the board and feels the friction of her loaded handgun on her ribcage, she is reminded of the new responsibility she has taken on. Each time she sees frustration on her students' faces or overhears teasing, she wonders if she has borne witness to a “warning sign.”

The armed teacher experiences a shift of perspective, a transformation of what anthropologist Charles Goodwin (1994) called “professional vision.” Engaged in the armed protection of her students, the armed teacher begins to read situations as a *protector*, and her students appear as *the protected*. Worse, if the armed teacher believes herself to be protecting her students against a potentially violent student *within* the school community—as the most publically prominent shootings may lead her to suspect—she takes on the perspective of an *enforcer*,

and her students appear as potential *threats*.¹⁶ What these perspectives amount to is a conceptual frame through which the armed teacher interprets, and constructs, her students' personalities and from which she derives expectations of future behavior. Within the

protector/protected frame, the armed teacher tends to see students as "vulnerable," "dependent," "innocent," or "helpless," while within the enforcer/threat frame students can appear as "emotionally unstable," "suspicious," "dangerous," or "criminal."

These personality constructions do not magically appear when using a gun; they are a deliberate element of the armed teacher's rigorous training. They are the *experiential meaning* of the training. Reading situations through the protector/protected and enforcer/threat frames enables the trained teacher to simplify otherwise complex and emotionally overwhelming situations and hence to follow reliable courses of action in addressing or preempting violence. Her training teaches her that potential victims tend to act in certain counterproductive ways when under extreme stress and should be directed with authoritative and clear commands. She learns that certain behaviors and personality traits—like depression, narcissism, alienation, and an exaggerated sense of entitlement (Critical Incidence Response Group, 2008)—can forebode future violence and should be carefully monitored as they develop. Finally, she learns that perpetrators of violent crime respond to some methods of confrontation and not others.¹⁷ Thus, on one hand, the protector/protected and enforcer/threat frames ensure safe use of the weapon that the teacher carries.

On the other hand, however, we should be extremely worried about conceptual frames that reduce the complex characters of both students and teachers to such terms. While the normal school environment, with its occasional tussles and conflicts, may require the teacher to play the roles of protector and even enforcer every now and then, the weaponization of teachers problematically emphasizes these roles at the expense of others. Armed protection implies an unambiguous power differential between teacher and student. In order to support student learning and wellbeing, however, teachers often have to relate to students in less authoritative and more egalitarian ways. Occasionally teachers have to lend a caring ear to students who need to talk through breakups, betrayals, problems at home or school, or their uncertain futures. In class, they may sometimes need to let students' interests guide the course of the lesson or to allow them to make decisions about what assignments to complete and how to complete them. Finally, teachers occasionally need to acknowledge that their students have something teach them, often in the form of dialogue. This latter role is especially crucial in the context of civic education, where the teacher sometimes has to provide an open forum for students to share their perspectives about race, culture, poverty, and other sensitive political issues.

Each of these roles is undermined by the rigid distribution of power within the practice of armed protection, however. When the teacher is monitoring for behavior that could potentially lead to violence—whether in scanning a hallway or analyzing a student's personality—she engages in a kind of surveillance that can seriously disrupt the relations of trust that are necessary for both parties to fulfill these roles. Indeed, only after extensive psychological training and surveillance could teachers accurately distinguish between the typical forms of "depression, narcissism, alienation, and an exaggerated sense of entitlement" that often present themselves in adolescence and those that the FBI warns may be harbingers of school violence. This surveillance may encourage teachers to see "abnormal" behavior as threatening precursors to violence rather than as expressions of individuality (Warnick, Johnson, & Rocha, 2010, p. 387). Such a policy can lead not only to a general posture of distrust of students among teachers but also to the belief among students that school personnel are "against" them. As mentioned previously, the adoption of this belief is likely to be highly sensitive to students' race and economic class.

That the weaponization of teachers fundamentally changes the educational environment for the worse is made even more clear when we consider the new relationship to law enforcement it forges between teachers and students. Unarmed public school teachers occupy an intermediary role between a civilian and a sworn agent of the state—for example, a police officer or a soldier.¹⁸ Armed public school teachers, however, are much closer to the police officer and soldier end of this spectrum than a typical public school teacher. To see why this is a problem, consider for a moment what it is like to interact with a police officer. For some, this might call up feelings of fear or extreme unease. But even in the hopefully standard case that we trust police officers to be fair servants of public safety, it would be odd to feel completely comfortable sharing difficult emotions or ideas with them. When we interact with a police officer, we encounter a powerful agent of the state who is sworn to follow legal procedures consistently. The discomfort we feel when we speak with an officer stems in part from the sheer power they have to control our fate but also from the rigidity with which we

expect they will adhere to these procedures. We cannot assume leniency in the case that we have made a mistake, and often we are not quite sure whether we have made one or not. Thus, we are uneasy; we say as much as we need to say and nothing more; and we quickly move on once permitted to go. Because armed teachers also have to follow strict bureaucratic and legal procedures ensuring safe use of their weapon and because they take on many of the traditional responsibilities of a police officer, students are likely to feel the same way toward armed teachers. As a result, an environment in which teachers are armed is unlikely to be one in which students would see teachers as confidants, dialogue partners, or peers.

One objection to the argument so far is that the armed teacher's authoritative gaze is really only adopted in emergency situations. How could having no gun one day really change the same teacher and the same school the next day? The answer so far is that the teacher's training involves a perspective shift that "spills over" into other non-emergency situations. As a result of her training, the teacher sees herself and her students differently, and this perspective shift, along with the changing ways that students begin to see their (armed) teachers, threatens to undermine the conditions of trust and equality that are necessary for some important educational forms of the teacher-student interaction.

Even if the objector were to disregard this argument, however, there is still another factor supporting the idea that armed protection will corrupt the school's learning environment. Think of the hypothetical vignette of the armed teacher's school day once more. Throughout the day, the armed teacher is constantly reminded that she carries with her a weapon that has the power to end lives. In order to ensure that her gun is properly stored, monitored, and maintained, the school requires that she perform a number of bureaucratic procedures to ensure safe use. She signs in at the front desk, retrieves the key for her gun locker, checks her to see when her next training installment takes place, and signs out again in the afternoon. While carrying the weapon, she makes sure that in any given situation her and her students' emotions do not get the better of them, and that behavior remains orderly. Paying respect to the power of the gun and following the advice of high-profile violence prevention researchers, she manages her class charily, making sure to set clear expectations, use advance organizers, make quick transitions, and establish consistent classroom procedures (e.g., Espelage et al., 2013, p. 79).

Not only has the teacher's perspective changed, but the way she makes educational decisions begins to shift as well. The technical requirements of safe gun usage determine to a greater and greater extent the character of the educational environment in which the teacher acts. Instead of pedagogical considerations and substantive educational aims driving the teacher's choices about how to run her classroom, these choices begin to conform to the logic of the gun. For an example of this, consider that one of the central aims of the public school is to create an environment for dialogue, a space in which students can learn important civic virtues like tolerance and responsiveness through open discussion and common projects. In the educational practices that pursue this aim, teachers and students, and students with one another associate in more spontaneous and fluid ways than usual. Students are given more control as teachers yield to the immediate interests and impulsive experiments of students. Students and teachers enter into a dialogue in which teachers learn from students and students learn from teachers. Thus each inhabits the role of "learner." Put differently, teachers become "teacher-students," and students become "student-teachers" (Freire, 1993, p. 61).

Yielding classroom control to students and their spontaneous whims is risky when the teacher carries a loaded weapon. A teacher so concerned for her students' safety that she has decided to arm herself will likely, and perhaps she *should*, avoid such uncertain classroom conditions and opt for a classroom dynamic that is more predictable, controlled, and muted. The pressure on teachers to do so is compounded by the fact that researchers of school violence have begun recommending precisely this kind of classroom management. They implore all teachers, for example, to "play a more proactive role mitigating variances in student mood and behavior" and adopt "a strategic position for control at the classroom level" (Espelage et al., 2013, pp. 79, 80). While these strategies may help class run smoothly, they can seriously undermine the fulfillment of one of the fundamental aims of the democratic public school.

One may object here that the dialogical practices I have just described make up a tiny percentage of the actual educational activities in which teachers and students are involved. The vast majority of the school day is devoted to tasks like note-taking, exercises, and examinations that promote content learning. A calculus teacher giving a lesson on derivatives cannot seriously be considered a "dialogue partner" with her students, who have never heard of the operation before. For these tasks, the authoritatively controlled classroom environment

of the operation system of these tasks, the authentically embodied classroom environment is ideal.

The objector's premises are true, but the conclusion does not follow. The calculus teacher indeed does not inhabit the role of the dialogue partner in teaching derivatives. She adopts a different role altogether, that of the "master mathematician," we might say, and her students correspondingly inhabit the role of "apprentices." Teachers rightly encourage discipline, order, and self-control in such situations, for each of these are indispensable habits for attaining mastery of mathematics. However, the discipline of the calculus teacher's classroom is qualitatively different from that of armed teacher's classroom. The armed teacher, as already mentioned, attempts to maintain predictable and disciplined classroom conditions at all times. In doing so, she inhabits the role of protector or enforcer. She cannot move out of these roles to accommodate the exigencies of the pedagogical moment because they are vested in her by the extensive organizational apparatus surrounding her weapon as well as the weapon's immense power.

The unarmed calculus teacher, on the other hand, can decide to switch roles and pursue a different course for her lesson at any moment. If the teacher notices that her students are frustrated by the seeming irrelevance of derivatives, for example, she may attempt to rekindle their interest with an open dialogue about their frustration and an appeal to the relevance of derivatives in physics. Thus the mastery aim gives way to the dialogical aim as the teacher changes her role from "master" to fellow dialogue partner.

This flexibility is an essential quality of teaching in a democratic educational setting. Pedagogical flexibility opens up a space for students to gain a sense of self-determination and to grow in ways that authentically express who they are and who they would like to become. The pedagogically flexible classroom allows students to gain real and empowering control over their own education; it is no longer something that is merely administered to them. When students see that their teacher is responsive to their interests and willing to trust them to guide the lesson, they learn that their interests are worth developing. Moreover, the pedagogically flexible teacher models a kind of other-directed responsiveness that is crucial for democratic deliberation in a multicultural society. Students learn that their educational experiences are enriched by the input of others and that their own cooperative involvement can bring the community further.

Pedagogical flexibility thus serves to create an environment in which two crucial civic virtues can be cultivated: intellectual autonomy and responsiveness. Pedagogical inflexibility, on the other hand, has the opposite effect. It teaches students that their interests are irrelevant to the aims of the school and that they should be subordinated to the demands of institutional protocol. Students learn that power need not be responsive—that it is mediated by weapons and bureaucratic procedure rather than cooperative dialogue. Ready-made teaching strategies designed to ensure student safety but unable to accommodate the emergent demands of students' interests are thus anti-democratic in a particularly serious way. They corrupt the delicate conditions necessary for democratic teaching and learning.

TEACHER VICTIMIZATION, EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, AND PUBLIC FEAR

The analysis has so far pointed to two central risks that the policy of arming teachers poses to the educational mission of the public school: (1) the infringement of students' developmental rights and (2) the disruption of the conditions of democratic teaching and learning. One important question has yet to be addressed in the analysis, however. Do teachers themselves have a right to *self*-protection that would allow them to come to school armed? After all, teachers face an alarming amount of violence in schools, in both overt and covert forms. In a recent survey of almost 3,000 teachers nationwide, the APA Task Force on Classroom Violence Directed Against Teachers found that 80% of participants reported being "victimized" in the past year. Ninety-four percent of these participants reported being victimized by a student, 44% characterized the incident as a physical attack, and 3% said they were involved in incidents in which a weapon was pulled (McMahon et al., 2014, p. 765).

Numbers like these would seem to justify drastic measures to ensure the safety of teachers. But they do not justify arming teachers. Teacher victimization is a troubling phenomenon, but it is broad, including such offenses as obscene gestures, internet bullying, and property damage. While these are certainly cases of malfeasance that can make for a hostile teaching environment, the arming of teachers in response lacks proportionality. With armed teachers present, these offenses, as well as the physical attacks that teachers sustain, may end in

much worse than bruises or detentions. After all, it is difficult even for trained police officers to know when an emotionally charged confrontation requires the use of firearms. Even if such an event were never to occur, the choice to arm teachers simply trades one hostile teaching environment for another.

With this final consideration, there appears to be very little ground left on which to justify the decision to arm teachers. Arming teachers is ethically illegitimate. Though this result would seem to bring the analysis to a close, leaving the discussion here would miss, I think, one of the most important and perplexing ethical dimensions of arming teachers. The sheer fact that *both sides* of the debate consistently disregard the potential impact of armed teachers on the educational environment of the school points to an ethical issue just as pressing as the particulars of the practice itself. How could the discussion of armed teachers so easily neglect its effects on the character and integrity of the American public school?

In closing, I would like to offer a few initial thoughts on this question. One obvious response is that in moments of great crisis we forgo—understandably and quite justifiably—the higher aims and concerns of our public institutions in order to establish conditions of basic safety. Arming teachers and other such security policies are not ideal solutions, but we have to do *something* about this crisis, it is claimed, and we have to do it now. The problem with this common response is, quite simply, that our schools are not in a moment of great crisis. While school violence in the United States is undoubtedly a problem, the way this problem is discussed in the media, and the sensationalized attention that school shootings receive, gravely distorts how safe schools actually are. According to a recent analysis of school homicides between 1996 and 2006, researchers found that “any given school can expect to experience a student homicide about once every 6000 years” (Borum et al., 2010, p. 27). From 2006 to 2011, the homicide rate of students at school *fell* 66%, making up less than 2% of all homicides against children (Robers, Kemp, & Rathbun, 2014). Given that the leading cause of death to youth is by far unintentional injury (“10 Leading,” 2010)—usually trauma induced by a motor vehicle accident (Nance et al., 2013, p. 941)—it would be wiser for those concerned about student safety to become driving instructors in their free time rather than implement any particular security policy such as arming teachers.

Although schools remain one of the safest places for children to be (Sheldon, 2011), the incessant talk of shooting “epidemics” and “trends” in the media sends the opposite message. To take one example, the title of CNN’s story covering the 2014 shooting at Reynolds High School reads “Oregon shooting: ‘This is becoming the new norm’—but will anything change?” (Payne & Ford, 2014). The coverage of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School has, unfortunately, been no different. These incidents are stomach-turning and horrifying by themselves; such sensational reporting makes reasonable deliberation on school security policy even harder than it already is. Hysteria drives the discussion rather than clear and careful thinking. Thus, the answer to our original question about the blind spots of the public debate is simply this: Public fear has clouded our judgment.

It would be a mistake to place all of the blame for the public fear surrounding school violence on “the media,” however. There are indeed some excellent examples of reporting on just this issue from major news outlets—for example, Cornell (2014) at *The Washington Post* and Neuman (2012) at *NPR*. More productive, for our purposes, is to consider the extent to which we, educational researchers, can inadvertently contribute to public fear—or at least allow it remain intact. Researchers of school violence, for example, regularly entreat teachers to learn to spot “abnormal” student behavior that may lead to violence and to perform “threat assessments” (Lebrun, 2003) at their school. They help teachers determine “risk factors” of school violence (Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000). And they recommend using highly structured and authoritative teaching strategies for avoiding the emotional outbreaks that can lead to violence (Espelage et al., 2013). The concepts of criminology and law enforcement are thus increasingly imported into the discourse on school violence, and they are often offered to teachers and school administrators as useful tools for developing violence prevention protocols. While these concepts are undoubtedly helpful in some sense, they can simultaneously cloud the fact that the “threats” and “risks” they refer to are potentially children. From this perspective, the use of such language in school settings seems, if not seriously inappropriate, then at least exaggerated and alarmist.

To take another, even more interesting example, consider the teacher victimization study cited at the beginning of this section. The authors claim in the very first line that “school violence” is a “significant public health crisis warranting immediate attention” (ibid., p. 753). This is a common enough refrain in school violence research. Yet, victimization—the actual focus of their study—is *not* identical to violence. And victimization, like student safety, is as much a matter of perception as it is of statistics. The researchers found, for example, that

much a matter of perceptions as it is of statistics. The researchers found, for example, that African American teachers reported victimization at a disproportionately lower rate than other racial groups. They suggest in their discussion that the low reporting numbers could be a result of African American teachers' "desensitization" to violence, as they more often work in urban schools that see a greater degree of violence.

What this suggestion overlooks is more telling than what it states. An equally plausible hypothesis, and one that also requires serious consideration, is that other racial groups are *hypersensitized* to violence. Pedro Noguera (1995) found, for example, that teachers unfamiliar with the environments in which they teach tend to fall victim to baseless fears that grow out of a lack of a cultural understanding of their students. "When teachers and administrators remain unfamiliar with the places and the ways in which their students live their lives outside of the school walls," Noguera wrote, "they often fill the knowledge void with stereotypes based upon what they read or see in the media" (pp. 203–204). Educators and school administrators, Noguera reminded us, are liable to uncritically adopt the interpretive lens of the media for understanding their students. As a result, educators and administrators

feel impelled to adopt drastic security measures simply because they are immersed in the public hysteria surrounding school violence. When educational researchers fail to take the effects of this hysteria into account, they allow it to persist.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Public fear of school violence has already taken concrete form in U.S. schools. Metal detectors, intercom systems, windowless classrooms, bulletproof anterooms, armed guards, and surveillance cameras—common furniture of high-security prisons—have come to define the American public school of the 21st century. Although these technologies seem to make us safer, they simultaneously communicate that the school is a place of fear and a place to be feared. They undermine the delicate relations of care and trust which form the foundation of civic education and which support an environment where students can confide in their teachers and give voice to their feelings of alienation, resentment, or anger—feelings that, if left to fester, can lead to violence. Of course, opening ourselves up to such discussions is likely to be difficult and uncomfortable. It involves risk. But this is not a risk that we should long to eliminate. The risk we take when we engage in unarmed dialogue with others—when we expose our hopes, our fears, and our bodies—is a statement of trust that all will communicate honestly and never resort to violence. This trust is the communicative foundation of our democratic institutions and the binding agent that unites us in a public sphere. It is the mark of our unconditional commitment to humanizing our relationships. And it is the *sine qua non* of civic education in a democratic society. As our schools increasingly resort to security measures intended to render schools and schoolchildren less "vulnerable," they undermine the very trust that is necessary for democratic communication. Because schools are the main institutions responsible for inculcating this value, the adoption of such measures amounts to a repudiation of their central democratic mission.

A critic reading through this final argument may be unsatisfied by its result. Are we to do *nothing* in response to the scourge of school shootings? Are we to keep our children vulnerable to violent crime for the sake of some vague ideal of democratic communication? No. Rather, we have to reject the premise that our children are made any less vulnerable when we adopt "tough" security measures like armed teachers. They remain vulnerable when we install metal detectors and intercoms throughout the school. They remain vulnerable when we rehearse lockdown drills. And they remain vulnerable when we use advance planners and authoritative teaching strategies. What each of these "solutions" overlooks are the crucial measures that must be taken outside of the school in order to prevent violence within it (see Espelage et al., 2013). That is, they fail to understand school violence to be an outgrowth of larger socioeconomic forces and instead narrowly reduce the problem to a matter of "mental health," school architecture, lockdown procedures, or teacher training. From this perspective, any effort to ensure school safety demands to be paired with larger-scale political efforts to alleviate the root causes of school violence.

Instead of offering definitive strategies for addressing these root causes—for they would at any rate have to be developed in concert with community leaders—the purpose of this analysis has been more conservative. I have attempted to point out the various ways in which the armed teacher can corrupt the delicate conditions of a democratic educational environment. Such an environment is not a pie-in-the-sky philosophical ideal but a concrete educational good to which children have a *right*. If educators and policy makers wish to protect this right in their deliberations concerning school security policy, then they can begin by considering the policy against the same four dimensions of democratic educational environments that have structured the preceding analysis of armed teachers.

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Students' perceptions. What impact will the new measure have on students' perception of safety, especially in light of their socioeconomic class and racial identity? To what extent might the measure infringe upon students' developmental rights?

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Student-teacher relationship. In what roles does the new measure frame teachers and students? Are these roles conducive to the cultivation of students' autonomy and authenticity? Might the measure impair the conditions of democratic communication between teachers and students?

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Democratic pedagogy. What pedagogical effects does the new measure carry with it? Does it tend to draw educators' attention away from their educational responsibilities, or replace pedagogical rationale with technical concerns?

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The school ethos. What is the source of the fear that is motivating the adoption of the new measure? Is it a reasonable reaction to a real threat, or a construction of ignorance? Can students' and teachers' fears be addressed such that an atmosphere of trust and care is preserved?

In order to derive ethically responsible educational policy from these questions, a sophisticated understanding of the way that child, teacher, and security technology interact in the school environment is required. Lacking this, our public deliberations will consistently fail to achieve the depth of insight and imagination required to address the complex problems of American public education and to preserve the integrity of our schools in the process.

Notes

1. The bills are as follows: Alabama HB 404, Texas HB 1009, Kansas HB 2052, and Tennessee HB 6. All were proposed in 2013.

2. The states are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Kansas, Oregon, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Vermont. Legislation proposing to allow armed teachers in schools is pending in Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Washington. For a comprehensive overview of proposed legislation concerning armed teachers, see "Guns in Schools" (2016) and "School Safety Legislation Since Newtown" (2013). Although each of the laws governing the arming of school personnel differ in their legislative reach, the following common characteristics can be discerned. Weapons carriage and use on school grounds is subject to the federal Gun Free Schools Zones Act (GFSZA) of 1990. The GFSZA generally disallows the carriage of loaded weapons onto school grounds. However, the GFSZA includes an exception allowing adults with a concealed weapon license or participating in a state or district "program" to bring their weapons onto K–12 school campuses (18 U.S.C. • 922(q)(2)(B)). In some 39 cases, state governments further limit these exceptions and disallow licensed adults to carry the weapons onto school grounds, while the other 11 states do not. Thus, the new legislation that emerged out of the Sandy Hook incident either proposes to remove these further state-imposed restrictions on licensed adults (thus allowing not only teachers but also other adults onto campus with firearms), or proposes to create a new form of school resource officer whose responsibilities can be fulfilled by licensed laypeople with permission from the school district (i.e., a "program"). Legislation generally does not mandate a school district to adopt particular procedures for arming its teachers nor does it stipulate definitions of lawful use of weapons in schools. The state thereby leaves it to individual schools and school districts to decide whether to arm their teachers, as well as the manner in which they do so. As a result, there is great variety among the states as to the number of schools with armed teachers, the number of students per armed teacher, weapon concealment and lethality, training, and teacher confidentiality. Some states do mandate the training of armed teachers at 40 hours of school policing training, as in the case of Texas, Tennessee, and South Dakota, but most do not require any training above that required for licensure. Finally, in no cases are school districts or the armed teachers themselves explicitly required to inform the public (including parents and children) of the fact or frequency of their carrying weapons. In Texas, armed teachers' confidentiality before the public is explicitly required by the legislation. An extreme case is Utah, where teachers can come to schools armed without notifying school administration (Schlanger, 2014). It is therefore quite difficult to know exactly how many schools are now home to armed teachers.

3. Exceptions to this are only to be found in several law review journals, all of which defend the practice in some capacity. See: Kopel (2009), Moody (2014), and Rostron (2014).
4. Each of the arguments that follow seeks to reconstruct the key moral intuitions that inform the sources cited here. Sometimes elements of two or more arguments can be found in the same stretch of reasoning in the public debate. I have separated them in order to emphasize their logical independence and thus to make the following ethical analysis more clear.
5. This argument assumes that the threat the armed teacher is supposed to defend against is a potentially violent student within the school community rather than an intruder from without. Because some of the most violent and publicly visible shootings have been perpetrated by students within the school community or by former students—for example, Columbine, Sandy Hook, and the shootings on college campuses—this is a safe assumption. Nonetheless, the individual teacher may understand the threat to be outside the school community or may have only a vague notion of where the threat stems from. As will be shown below, this matters for the ethical analysis.
6. In 2008, the Critical Incidence Response Group of the FBI released a report outlining several behaviors and personality traits that “should be regarded as warning signs” that a student may become violent (p. 15), though it is careful to say that the list does not constitute a school-shooter profile (p. 1). I have formulated the traits I refer to here so as to capture many of the more specific ones mentioned in the FBI report (pp. 17–21).
7. The actual probability of a school shooting occurring is astronomically low, as is discussed in the penultimate section.
8. One of the reasons the debate has become so acrimonious is undoubtedly that both sides are quick to accuse the other of “losing touch” with reality.
9. See, for example, Duggan’s (2001) “More Guns, More Crime” versus Lott’s (1998) More Guns, Less Crime.
10. The prioritization of values over statistical reality is a widespread phenomenon in public discourse, although its influence is particularly noticeable in the gun control debate.
11. Because the probability of a violent attack requiring neutralization by an armed teacher is already extremely low, even a “great” increase in student safety would be negligible in practical effect.
12. Even Asa Hutchinson’s (2013) NRA-funded Report of the National School Shield Task Force recommends a minimum 60–80 hours of training for school personnel.
13. This problem may be even more salient in schools with students whose home cultures are more accepting of spontaneous emotional expression, or who have behavior problems in higher percentage than the “average” school I am describing here.
14. The classic study is Berkowitz & LePage (1967).
15. The thought experiment that follows attempts to highlight the effects of arming teachers on the school learning environment. A thought experiment is a particularly useful method for the present inquiry because direct empirical evidence is not available and serious ethical constraints bar the use of live experiments. Thought experiments are in general useful for clarifying which ethical values and principles are relevant in a given scenario and for teasing out the ways in which our moral intuitions influence our judgments about the scenario. This is a common methodology in applied and educational ethics (e.g., Levinson & Fay, 2016). I have tried to ensure the verisimilitude of the thought experiment by connecting its details to real statements made by armed teachers who have been interviewed by the media (e.g., Murphey, 2014).
16. It is perhaps most realistic to think that teachers’ understanding of the source of the threat is more vague than is assumed here. That is, the threat remains simply a potentiality for the teacher, located neither inside nor outside the school community. Insofar as that is true, the protector/protected frame would be the more likely one for teachers to adopt. However, because many of the most prominent shootings have been perpetrated by current or former students, it is not unlikely that the teacher will believe the threat to be within the school community, thus adopting an enforcer/threat perspective. From an ethical standpoint, this is clearly the more troubling subject frame. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this important point.
17. This account of a hypothetical armed teacher training is based on the content of ALICE training courses. Training materials can be found on the ALICE website (<http://www.alicetraining.com>) and on YouTube.
18. Thanks to an anonymous review for encouraging me to make this point explicit.

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