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Safety, Advocacy, and the Teacher's Role: Pre-service Teachers and School Shooting Policies

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Abstract: In this qualitative case study, I examine pre-service teachers' experiences with school shooting policy. Analysis of individual interviews, group discussions and reflective memos with pre-service teachers ($n=7$) in seven Massachusetts districts shows that pre-service teachers, while deeply concerned about the possibility of school shootings, viewed existing policies as ineffective, damaging to their pedagogical practice and relationships with students, and out of step with teachers' concerns. Further, they interpreted proposed policies as undermining the value of teachers in contemporary society and threatening the core tenets of teachers' work. Constrained by limited professional development around policy involvement, pre-service teachers expressed significant doubts about their ability to effect meaningful policy change. This research has implications for educational policy and teacher policy involvement.

Keywords: educational policy; school policy; school safety; teacher role

Seguridad, defensa y el papel del maestro: Maestros en servicio y políticas de tiro escolar

Resumen: En este estudio de caso cualitativo, examino las experiencias de los maestros en servicio previo con la política de tiro escolar. El análisis de entrevistas individuales, discusiones grupales y memorandos reflexivos con maestros de pre-servicio ($n = 7$) en siete distritos de Massachusetts muestra que los maestros de pre-servicio, aunque profundamente preocupados por la posibilidad de tiroteos en la escuela, vieron las políticas existentes como ineficaces, perjudiciales para sus práctica

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pedagógica y relaciones con los estudiantes, y fuera de sintonía con las preocupaciones de los maestros. Además, interpretaron las políticas propuestas como minar el valor de los docentes en la sociedad contemporánea y amenazar los principios básicos del trabajo de los docentes. Restringidos por un desarrollo profesional limitado en torno a la participación en las políticas, los maestros de pre-servicio expresaron dudas significativas sobre su capacidad para efectuar cambios significativos en las políticas. Esta investigación tiene implicaciones para la política educativa y la participación de la política docente.

Palabras clave: política educative; política escolar; seguridad escolar; rol docente

Segurança, advocacia e o papel do professor: Professores de pré-serviço e políticas de tiro na escola

Resumo: Neste estudo de caso qualitativo, examino as experiências de professores em serviço com a política de tiro na escola. A análise de entrevistas individuais, discussões em grupo e memorandos reflexivos com professores de pré-serviço ($n = 7$) em sete distritos de Massachusetts mostra que os professores de pré-serviço, embora profundamente preocupados com a possibilidade de tiroteios nas escolas, viam as políticas existentes como ineficazes, prejudiciais para seus alunos. prática pedagógica e relacionamento com os alunos, e fora de sintonia com as preocupações dos professores. Além disso, eles interpretaram as políticas propostas como minando o valor dos professores na sociedade contemporânea e ameaçando os princípios fundamentais do trabalho dos professores. Constrangidos pelo desenvolvimento profissional limitado em torno do envolvimento das políticas, os professores de pré-serviço expressaram dúvidas significativas sobre sua capacidade de efetuar mudanças significativas nas políticas. Esta pesquisa tem implicações na política educacional e no envolvimento das políticas dos professores.

Palavras-chave: política educacional; política escolar; segurança escolar; papel do professor

Introduction

Safety comprises one of the four key elements of school climate understood as the “quality and character of school life” (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009) and has been shown to correlate with student achievement (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Though “school safety” has historically been understood to refer to students’ socio-emotional wellbeing and efforts to address behavioral challenges in the classroom, in recent decades it has expanded to include the threat of school shootings. While school shootings have stayed fairly constant over the past two decades and remain relatively rare (Dinkes, Kemp, Baum, & Snyder, 2009; Modzeleski, et al., 2008), the frequency of what have been termed “rampage shootings” (Rocque, 2012) heighten public fears about physical safety in schools, specifically in the form of gun violence. Today, a significant percentage of parents view schools as sites of potential violence and fear for their children’s safety at school (Midlarsky & Klain, 2005; Nagy & Danitz, 2000).

Public concern about school shootings has resulted in a range of policy solutions (US Department of Education, 2007; for an extensive description of recommendations for preventing school shootings, see Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2009). Such policy solutions, both proposed and enacted, vary significantly across districts and schools nationwide, and we know little about how teachers experience the policies intended to keep them and their students safe. This paper describes how pre-service teachers, the newest members of the teaching profession, make sense of policies addressing the threat of school shootings. What experiences do they have with school shooting safety policies? How do these policies impact their emerging practice as teachers? Finally, how do their experiences interact with their beliefs about teacher policy engagement?

Safety relating to school shootings is a pressing concern for pre-service teachers. However, they have little confidence in the efficacy of the school safety policies they encounter in their school sites. Pre-service teachers make sense of policies in a larger sociopolitical context and understand them to reflect problematic beliefs about the role and responsibilities of the teacher in public education. Further, pre-service teachers see few viable opportunities to be actively involved in policy. These findings add to current understandings of pre-service teachers' orientations towards policy involvement and resulting implications for educational policy, teaching, and learning.

Related Literature

Teachers and Policy

Despite the frequent personification of “policy,” it is the people on the ground who enact policies according to their own prior knowledge, beliefs, positionalities, and goals. Teachers, as policy actors, interpret and enact policy based on their existing knowledge, experiences, and practices through a dynamic sensemaking process that takes place in multiple contexts (Coburn, 2001; Knapp, Ferguson, Bamberg, & Hill, 1998; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Weick, 1995). Sense-making is active and interactive; teachers draw upon resources and networks available to them to interpret policy and the messages around it (Coburn, 2001; Spillane et al, 2002). Through this interpretation and implementation of policy, teachers engage in ongoing work as policy makers and exert various levels of agency and power throughout the policy process (Good, Barocas, Chavez-Moreno, Feldman, & Canela, 2017).

Though instrumental in policy enactment (Knapp, et al, 1998; Lipsky, 1980), teachers are not well-represented at every step of the policy process. For example, teachers are rarely involved in the design of policy agendas (Conley, 1991; Ingersoll, 2006; Smylie, 1992; Taylor & Bogotch, 1994). They are also relatively unlikely to be involved in policy advocacy, i.e. critical efforts to influence existing policy towards equitable systems change (Ball, 2006; Dubetz & de Jong, 2011; Vidovich, 2001). A range of conditions and systems can support or impede teacher involvement at different levels of policymaking, including but not limited to teacher dispositions, school leadership orientations, and organizational structures and cultures (Good, Hara, Dryer, & Harper, forthcoming).

Much of the literature around teachers at any stage of the policy process is oriented towards practicing teachers. We know little about how pre-service teachers interact with the educational policies they encounter in their professional training and their gradual transition to full-time teaching. And yet pre-service teachers are not immune to the influence of educational policy; indeed, they too act and are acted upon in the policy landscape of teacher education programs and of schools. Like their in-service peers, pre-service teachers are expected to implement a variety of policies as part of their duties and make sense of policy through social interaction and negotiation (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995). Therefore, their experiences, beliefs, and actions also have a direct impact on policy implementation and its outcomes for teaching and learning.

The pre-service period may be a particularly fruitful time for teachers to explore their relationship to policy. Pre-service teacher education has been described as “ideally situated to foster (...) a shift in learning” (Kennedy, 1999, p. 57), and as a central, though often underutilized opportunity to encourage new ways of thinking about teaching and learning (deJong & Harper, 2005). Student teaching also represents a crucial period during which pre-service teachers learn what it means to “do” policy as teachers. Though there is evidence of growing efforts specifically intended to support and develop practicing teachers as active policy actors, (Felton & Koestler, 2015; Vadeboncoeur et al, 1996; Woodrow & Caruana, 2017), the research from teacher education

suggests that teacher capacity around policy continues to be constrained by the omission of policy as a content knowledge domain (Behizadeh, Thomas, & Cross, 2017; Floden & Meniketti, 2005; Hara, 2017; Heineke et al, 2015). As a result, the opportunities that pre-service teacher education affords for teachers-in-training to explore different ways of engaging with policy are often limited. Given the increasing policy pressures on public schoolteachers, including but not limited to those relating to assessment and accountability, pre-service teachers who are well-versed in policy are a valuable resource. It is crucial to explore how these newest members of the teaching experience policy in schools to better understand how they encounter policy in their classroom practice and how teacher education and field experiences support or limit their policy capacity.

Critical Policy Studies

This paper draws upon a critical policy studies framework to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers with school shooting policies. I conceptualize “policy” as a public response to perceived social problems that is “revealed through texts, practices, symbols, and discourses that define and deliver values including goods and services as well as regulations, income, status, and other positively or negatively valued attributes” (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 2)

Historically, policy design and policy implementation have been viewed as providing a solution to social problems through a value-neutral, linear process (Cochran & Malone, 1999; Stone, 2002). In contrast, critical policy scholars understand policy as developed and enacted through complex, often contentious social processes that are historically situated, culturally mediated, and negotiated by a variety of stakeholders (Ball, 1993; Stone, 2002). Because policies are designed and implemented at a particular moment in sociopolitical time, they are themselves sociocultural artifacts; they are a product of the societal values of that place and time, but also produce social values themselves (Allan, 2010). The work of policy making and remaking that takes place in schools and other sites has been described as a continuous policy cycle (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992). Gildersleeve (2013) asserts, “We must think of policy as both the act and the action, as both intervention and the intervening, as both movement and the moving” (p. 2).

The analysis in this paper is informed by the conceptualization of policy as operating on three planes: policy as discourse, policy as text, and policy as practice (Ball, 1990, 1993, 1994). Policy as discourse represents idealized notions of society and schooling and societal norms that shape what policies are considered desirable and normative (Vidovich, 2001). Policy texts are the official legislative documents that are the outcome of debate and compromise and reflect societal relationships and power dynamics around a particular social issue. Finally, policy as practice relates to the actual enactment of policy in schools and classrooms (Heck, 2004). Policy is made and remade iteratively across all three planes.

Ultimately, policy processes can lead to a variety of unanticipated consequences, including unintended, new problems, and new identities (Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009). Applying a critical lens to safety policies through a case study examination of the experiences of pre-service teachers allows “structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people’s perception and experiences” (Ozga, 1990; p. 359).

Method and Data

The data presented in this study draws from a larger, ongoing 18-month qualitative case study (Yin, 2003) of pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher education program at a broad-access

public university in Massachusetts. Data presented in this paper was gathered between August of 2018 and May of 2019. Participants were recruited from the total pool of approximately 20 pre-service teachers who had completed all coursework required for eligibility for the student teaching practicum and asked them to respond to a recruitment email if interested in participating in a research study about pre-service teachers and contemporary teaching practice and educational justice. Two participants were male and five were female. Though the generalizability of data from a sample of $n=7$ is limited, the purpose of case study design (Yin, 2003) is not to generalize to every context but rather to provide deep and nuanced data from one context. Case study data can provide insight to inform decision-making that extends beyond the initial site (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participants ranged in age from 20 to 28 and in self-identified socio-economic class from “working class” to “middle class.” Participants’ self-identified stances on gun policy ranged from conflicted to strongly in favor of gun control. None had personal experience with firearms. All were placed in a variety of teaching placements in public school sites in Eastern Massachusetts, ranging in size and population from a regional, racially-diverse school to an urban pilot school (i.e., one afforded more autonomy in staffing, budget, curriculum, etc. than standard public schools in the district) serving a majority African-American and Latinx study body. Five participants identified as white and two preferred to self-identify as “Brazilian-American.” Though the homogeneity of the sample is a limitation, participant demographics reflect percentages for teacher education programs nationwide (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Data Sources and Analysis

The first source of data was a series of two semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting between 45-90 minutes with each participant over the course of twelve months (Fontana & Frey, 2000). To ensure the reliability or trustworthiness, interview protocols were shared with experts in the fields of education policy and teacher education for feedback. The foci of the interviews were pre-service teachers’ experiences with and opinions about a range of pre-service teaching experiences (see Appendices A and B). Interview data allowed for the crafting of individual portraits of each participant providing important context about their beliefs, their emerging practices, and the socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts of their respective school sites. Interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed following each interview.

Data was also gathered from group discussions. Meetings ranged in duration from one to three hours and took place over the course of the study for a total of four meetings. All four meetings were open-ended in theme and covered a variety of participant-directed themes ranging from daily issues arising in field placements to the purpose of public education. Meetings were audio recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed following each meeting.

The third source of data was the set of participants’ individual written reflections before, during, and after their teaching semesters. Reflections were written at the participants’ discretion and ranged in topic from daily experiences during field experiences to overall questions about the role of the teacher in society. These reflections were generated electronically via email or via text message, at times one-on-one with the researcher, and at times in group form with other participants.

Data analysis in this study followed an analytic spiral (Creswell, 1998), an iterative process cycling through multiple steps of representation, classification, and interpretation. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), all three sources of data were brought together in reflective notes. In an “open coding” phase, data were taken line by line and an initial set of codes were identified and reduced to specific themes based on patterns in the data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Initial data analysis of interviews, discussion transcripts and reflective memos from participants focused on pre-service teachers’ understandings of the purpose of teaching, educational justice, the role of the

teacher in society, and their experiences transitioning from professional preparation to professional practice. As a result of this initial phase of analysis, in a second “focused coding” phase data was re-coded around pre-service teachers’ understandings of school shooting policy and its implications for their practice. After a count frequency of codes, I noted relationships and built a chain of evidence from which to contrast and compare the data. In reporting findings, excerpts taken directly from participants’ statements and reflections were used in an effort to preserve their own voices. The final categories were *classroom experiences, responses to existing school shooting policies, key experiences, emotions, the broader policy context, teacher value, the responsibility of teachers, gun control sentiment, impact on practice, relationships with students, professional training, and policy advocacy.*

Validity and reliability of findings and ethical research practice were attended to in the following ways. First, having three sources of data allowed for important triangulation (Creswell, 1998). In addition, I engaged in member checking by periodically offering findings-in-progress with participants to seek feedback and clarification. Further, I discussed coding with colleagues through two external “audits” in order to address the stability of responses to multiple coders (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, I shared my own reflective memos regarding data analysis and early versions of this work with colleagues to assess areas of potential bias or subjectivity.

Table 1
The Demographic Information of Interviewed Teachers

Pseudonym	Grade Level	District	Self-identified stance on gun control
John	Secondary	Urban/Large	Supportive
Brendan	Secondary	Suburban/Small	Unsupportive/Conflicted
Devon	Secondary	Suburban	Supportive
Caterina	Elementary	Regional/Large	Conflicted
Brittany	Elementary	Suburban/Mid-size	Unsupportive/Conflicted
Jessica	Elementary	Urban/Mid-size	Supportive
Sofia	Elementary	Urban/Mid-size	Uncertain/Supportive

Note: These names are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participants.

Findings

In this section, I present study results relating to pre-service teachers and school shooting policies. First, I discuss pre-service teachers’ encounters with school shooting policies in their school sites. Second, I discuss participants’ perceived impact of these policies on pedagogical practice. Next, I share findings about how school shooting policies mediate pre-service teachers’ views of the role and value of the teacher in society. Finally, I discuss the relationship between school shooting policies and participants’ beliefs about teacher policy advocacy.

“I think about it all the time”: Student Teachers and School Safety Policies

Massachusetts gun policies are among the more stringent in the United States. Gun owners are subject to background checks and are required to hold a license. Assault weapons are banned in the Commonwealth, and a 2018 “red flag” law allows judges to confiscate the firearms of individuals considered to be a risk to themselves or others (Massachusetts General Laws, 2014).

Though pre-service teachers were aware that school shootings remain a relatively uncommon event in their state as well as nationwide, they nevertheless described deep concern about the threat of a shooting at their school. Devon explained, "For me, at least, it's a constant thing. Not all day, every day, but at least once during that day you think 'Wow, this could be a reality.'" Sofia agreed, saying "Yes. I think about it all the time." Brendan, who noted how rarely he considered his own physical safety in settings outside of school, said, "I've definitely thought about it and thought about how I would react." Although there were multiple mass shootings that took place in the United States during the period of data collection both in and out of school settings, participants stated that their feelings were not tied to any specific, single incident.

Pre-service teachers felt strongly that they should be prepared for the possibility of a school shooting regardless of its likelihood. Jessica stated,

I've told my boyfriend that, and he thinks I'm way over the top. But I feel like that's a really real fear. Because he's like, 'That won't happen.' But it could. And that's what every other teacher who has been in that situation has thought, like, 'It'll never happen here.' So, I feel like you have to be prepared."

Pre-service teachers' desire for preparedness manifested in a keen awareness of the physical layout of their school sites. Participants described instinctively gauging exits, hallways, and parking lots upon their arrival at a new school placement, even if they did not do so in other public places. John described assessing the possibility of a shooting in a middle school where he had previously been placed. He noted, "I'm 6'3. I've never been robbed, or physically threatened. I don't think about my physical safety very often," but acknowledged that he had made a point to note the physical layout of his classroom early on in his placement. He went on, "[At that school], they have the kind of glass window next to the door. So, you can see the room pretty well from the hallway. It's not like you can hide in the corner." Jessica explained, "I've already thought what I would do when I have a classroom. I look at where you can see in from the door and mark it with a piece of tape. I know you put a paper, if you can, over the windows. But if there's no time for that, I would get those kids where you can't see from the door."

Pre-service teachers also took note of policy responses to the possibility of gun violence in their school sites. All of the middle and high schools represented in this study had adopted school safety measures included limiting outside access to school buildings through buzzer systems, sign-in sheets, and identification checks, checking bags for weapons within the school building, and increased surveillance in the form of school resource officers (Addington, 2009). While the elementary schools in the sample did not have school resource officers or bag checks, they too had policies to limit access to school buildings by locking doors and checking visitors' identification.

There is evidence that school safety measures, such as the presence of school resource officers, result in parents feeling that their children are safer in schools (McDevitt & Paniello, 2005). However, participants were skeptical about the efficacy of policy responses to the threat of gun violence in their school buildings. Devon said, "In my field study we have police officers that are just there all the time. But that's kind of like, just, a reminder. We don't know. This could be a reality." John said, "We have one school resource officer. It doesn't make me feel safer that Officer Joe is there to handle the situation. And I don't know what 'handling the situation' would look like."

Pre-service teachers also expressed significant concern about the implications of these policy responses for teaching, learning, and relationships. All participants, including those in elementary schools, were especially worried about policies that would add to the punitive qualities of contemporary schools. Indeed, research suggests that the implementation of school resource officers and metal detectors not only increase students' view of school as punitive (Noguera, 1995) but also

contribute to higher reports of student victimization (Schreck & Miller, 2003) and violation of student privacy (Addington, 2009). Pre-service teachers highlighted these concerns for all students, but particularly for groups already systematically and historically marginalized in schooling. John explained,

When you have metal detectors? And you have armed guards at school? It just sounds like a prison to me. Anything you can do to make school less like a prison you can point to the rigid schedule, the authority figure, only being able to go to the bathroom at a certain time [...] I don't think having armed guards and metal detectors is right.

Beyond the presence of security or the use of backpack checks, policy enactments afforded high visibility in the front offices and entryways of schools (Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2015), none of the participants identified an official policy text addressing protocols in the event of a school shooting. In one school, a portion of the staff had attended a training session. Jessica, the pre-service teacher placed in that school, recalled,

There's no building protocol as far as I know. [A few teachers] went to something [some training]. I forget what it was called, but they did go to something. Ace? Alice? Yes, that's what it was. They went to that and that's what they were talking about. And they said they should have that for the whole school. I agree. There should be something for the whole school.

Pre-service teachers who came across mention of lockdown drills in a school document were often told that the policy was not being implemented in the building at that time. One such student, John, described his experience as follows:

I met with my teacher before I started student teaching, and we went through the checklist and when we got to that part about drills, [or]lockdowns, [or] shooter safety drills, she said "We don't do those here." In terms of an official policy, being explained to me, I've not heard one.

Pre-service teachers had serious doubts about active shooter drills as an effective or desirable solution to school safety concerns. They did not advocate for their implementation and vehemently critiqued the active shooter drills they had heard about taking place in other districts. During this study, a school district in Indiana made national news after mandating a school shooting simulation as teacher professional development. During the drill, teachers were shot with plastic pellet guns in order to simulate an active shooter situation. Caterina said, "I would be completely traumatized by that. Either as the person roleplaying the shooter or as a victim. I refuse to believe that's the best way we have." Another elementary student teacher said, "These [drills] really aren't the responses I'm looking for."

Nevertheless, pre-service teachers saw the absence of an articulated, uniformly implemented response to a possible school shooting as an oversight of teachers' concern about the possibilities of a school shooting. The lack of school policy was not interpreted as reassurance to their in-service counterparts, either; in fact, practicing teachers at the schools in this study prepared for the possibility of a school shooting on their own. Across school sites, teachers in grade level teams or in neighboring classrooms formulated ad hoc plans. John reported hearing from a supervising practitioner in a previous field placement that "If she heard something going on if there was someone in the building, she would just lock her door." Jessica said,

So, during the professional development, [the teachers] were talking, and I was almost in tears listening to them talk because they were talking about

people coming in, like, killers, people with a gun. They were saying, “Yeah, we have a plan. I’m going to run across the hall, into the bathroom, lock myself in there.” They have a plan where the kids are going to grab, just anything sharp. [...] I know that they said that they didn’t agree with the “Just hide.” They agreed with hiding, but also be prepared to fight back. Don’t just be a sitting duck.

Although pre-service teachers were party to these informal conversations, which often took place during planning meetings or at lunch, they were not active participants because of their role as apprentices. As Brendan pointed out, “I’m a guest in the school, you know? I spend a lot of time just listening. I don’t often jump into a conversation with a larger group of teachers or say what I think.” As a result, participants were left wondering what their role might be in the event of a school shooting during their time in a school. Recalling her own experience, Jessica said, “The way that they were talking about the plan was scary. It just felt more real. I’ve never heard teachers talk like that. And I was kind of like, ‘Well, thanks for telling me about the plan! [laughs] Glad I know now!’

Pre-service Teachers’ Understandings of Impact on Practice

Pre-service teachers found that their concern about the possibility of a school shooting, combined with their lack of confidence in existing school safety policy, impacted their professional practice. Specifically, participants described being on alert for student behaviors that might represent “red flags” for the future. One elementary student described it as being “hyper aware at all times.” Similarly, Devon explained,

There are times when I’ll read some of the poetry or some of the things that students are writing or saying, and it is concerning. There’s already one thing where there’s one student who non-stop talks about murder and blood, and that is just something that [I’ve made sure] the guidance counselor is aware of.

This was particularly fraught for elementary-level teachers, who recognized that a crucial element of their work as teachers of young children was to nurture students’ socio-emotional abilities. Caterina said, “I’m supposed to be supporting human souls, you know? Not thinking—could you maybe do this horrible thing? Like, could we maybe get some school-wide guidance on how to address *that* problem?” They felt that to consciously or unconsciously ascribe the possibility of future violent behavior to young children would directly undermine a key facet of their professional responsibility.

Teachers preparing to work with older students, too, were concerned about consequences for their pedagogical practice. The participants preparing to teach English, for instance, were particularly aware of the tension between creative expression and material that might be interpreted as a potential safety concern. John stated, “In English class, getting students to open up and feeling like it’s ok to be vulnerable, especially in their writing, is so important.” Devon agreed, saying

It’s, like, creative license and I don’t want to take that away from my students. [...] I think it’s hard because it’s English and you don’t want to take—some of it could just be pure “This is what I want to write about” and other times, I don’t want to not be helping the student if they actually need help.

Pre-service teachers’ self-described hyper-awareness of student behavior necessarily influenced their relationships with students. The teachers of older students were especially cautious to deescalate any situation that felt emotionally tense, partly as a matter of standard classroom management but especially in the context of their fear of a potential school shooting. John stated,

Just in general, I mean, I think try not to escalate anything and if I notice a student getting frustrated, or maybe I've been prodding too much, I'll step away rather than continue to harp on them about something. My goal is to de-escalate everything. If I notice a student getting frustrated, even if I would like them not to be frustrated and would like them to be doing something else, you have to think about 'What will happen if I keep doing this?'

Pre-service teachers were also keenly attuned to the consequences of inadvertently pathologizing or stigmatizing mental illness on their relationships with students. Devon explained,

That, to me the hardest battle. Because just like I don't want to discriminate against people's race, I don't want to discriminate against mental health. And so that...is where I'm struggling the most, because I don't want to be tip-toeing around a student because I'm afraid. I have had to almost check myself a little bit, because I think I have let that influence the way that I'm then reacting or then responding to that student.

In addition, participants wanted to engage directly with their students about the societal, political, and systemic factors contributing to school shootings. Jessica noted the irony of having her own and her students' safety on her mind while simultaneously feeling she could not directly address the reasons why classroom doors needed to be locked. Brittany stated that she would never directly address the reasons behind locked-door policies with her second-grade students, saying "I feel like I would be comfortable with anything above fifth or sixth graders. Anything below that, it makes me a little uncomfortable. Because they're still so innocent, and I don't want to tell them anything that their parents wouldn't want them to know." Though the other pre-service teachers agreed with the need to tread carefully, they felt strongly that school shootings and the "why" behind safety procedures were important topics that they wished to address directly in their classrooms. Caterina argued, "If we're talking about shootings in schools and how do we approach that, I think we have to. Because it's the world they live in. I would go further than saying "Oh yeah, that happened [someplace else]. Poor families."

Because they recognized the challenges of broaching such topics effectively, pre-service teachers wished to observe and rehearse how supervising practitioners might do so successfully. However, participants characterized this sort of discussion as a rare occurrence. None of their supervising teachers, even those with whom they had been placed at the time of the Parkland school shooting, had gone beyond acknowledging the tragedy to discuss school shootings in a systematic and pedagogically relevant way that might also connect to academic material. Brendan, a future middle school teacher, viewed this as a missed opportunity. He recalled,

I remember I had a teacher in high school. It was after a school shooting somewhere, I forget where it was. It was on everyone's mind. It was one of the first big, big, media-covered school shootings. And she kind of sat us down for half an hour and we got out everything we wanted to say. Because it was kind of tense moment, for a lot of us. Very uncomfortable. People had been shot at a school. [We need to be able to have] a conversation where people can just express themselves and think critically about something that's going on in the world.

Participants were frustrated by the limited opportunities to learn how to address problems of practice such as those described above. There was no mechanism in their training by which pre-service teachers could learn how to reflect on their fears and their impact on their teaching, or to address sensitive issues around safety in a low-stakes way.

When a potentially sensitive situation arose, participants were swiftly relieved of any responsibility or involvement. An elementary student described a past field placement in which a student had written a threatening note to the school, recalling that after delivering the note to her supervising practitioner, the situation was taken out of her hands. Participants were simultaneously grateful to have a supervisor to whom they could defer and concerned about this lack of professional development in terms of their future practice. A pre-service teacher whose student had written about murder on multiple occasions in English class said, “Thank goodness that I am student teaching and I have someone that I can come to and say, ‘OK, is this something that I need to be, like, investigating further. [...] But personally, that was just kind of taken from me and my [supervising practitioner] was like, ‘I’m going to handle it.’”

Another secondary student stated,

I’m still five weeks into student teaching? Six weeks in? So, I’m still learning, new situations are coming up every day that I have to adjust to. But you want to be prepared for every situation, like if students are going to fight in my classroom, or whatever, you still want to know what policy is in terms of that, what the procedural things that are in place. How should I react, and what are the ways that I could react?

Notably, none of the participants reported explicitly asking for direct guidance from their university faculty supervisors or their supervising practitioners in the field. As Sofia explained, “I mentioned it to my university supervisor once. But there’s so much other stuff to keep track of, and I don’t really think anything would have changed, anyway.” Similarly, several other participants felt that in light of the numerous requirements of teacher education programs, their supervising practitioners and university supervisors would be unlikely to offer authentic, hands-on opportunities to practice handling student concerns around mental health, balancing legitimate concerns around safety and self-expression, or addressing school shootings in a pedagogically relevant manner. Pre-service teachers cited internet research as their primary means of access to information about how to broach the topic of school shootings with their students.

School Shooting Policy and the Role of the Teacher in Society

Pre-service teachers who perceived a gap between their own sense of threat and existing school policy around school shootings saw an even larger inconsistency between teachers’ concerns and proposed federal and state policy to address gun violence in schools. Participants were acutely aware of ongoing debate around the use of public funds to arm teachers and were vehemently against such a proposal. Sofia stated, “I think [that proposal is] ridiculous. I do not ever want to hold a life in my hands. [...] I don’t feel like I would ever want to be in close proximity to a gun or hold it. I do not want to be armed. I would not feel safe if I had a gun.”

All the participants felt strongly that using a gun to protect themselves and the lives of their students against a potential school shooting was a fundamental distortion of teacher professional responsibility. In group discussion, participants had the following exchange:

Caterina: A gun, as far as I know, the purpose of a gun is to kill. Now, if someone comes with a gun to kill my children, that’s their responsibility. I don’t know, afterlife belief, whatever, it’s their responsibility. It’s on them. Is it going to hurt? Oh, yeah. If I ever die in a school shooting, is it going to hurt my family? Oh, yeah. But [...] I just don’t think that’s my responsibility, period.

Jessica: I agree completely. Arming teachers? I don’t know what people are thinking. I don’t feel like it’s my job to use a gun to kill someone who’s coming in to my school.

Participants interpreted policy proposals to arm teachers as conflating teacher caring with the responsibility to take on physical risk. Brittany described a conversation with a group of practicing teachers at her school about what each teacher would do to shield students from a potential attack. One teacher present during the discussion argued that it was the teacher's role to physically protect students at the risk of his or her own life. Jessica recalled, "My [supervising practitioner] said, 'I don't know if I could.' She has a young daughter. But as a teacher, you're supposed to." Participants collectively acknowledged the difficulty of pushing back against internalized messages about the self-sacrificing teacher, noting their far-reaching implications for norms about teacher behavior. Though conflicted, they ultimately rejected the notion that a teacher's professional responsibility towards students extended to risking one's own life. While all believed that they would likely seek to shield their students at their own risk in the event of a shooting, they objected to the assumption that doing so was a necessary element of being a good teacher.

Further, participants argued that being armed undermined their central priorities as educators to encourage students' social, emotional, and intellectual growth, duties that they viewed as key components of teacher caring. Those participants who were already wary about the impact of school resource officers and metal detectors or other forms of surveillance on students' perceptions of school as a punitive, prison-like space pointed to the degree to which an armed teacher would impact students. John stated,

Something that's extremely important in teaching is building relationships with students. People who [believe in arming teachers] think of teachers more like authority, which is how law enforcement is viewed, and I think that's wrong. The teachers' job is to work through problems with students and I want students to be able to come to me with their problems and things that are challenging them and not fear me. I don't want any student to fear me. I had teachers I feared in high school and it was awful. I would never have gone to them about anything and that was probably detrimental to my education, because I didn't feel comfortable going to them.

Pre-service teachers identified fundamental beliefs about the value of teachers in society undergirding the call to arm teachers. They perceived the proposal as an undervaluing of the work of teachers by stakeholders wielding decision-making power. In group discussion, two participants had the following conversation:

Devon: It kind of makes me feel like they don't take our job as educators serious enough, because if they took that part serious they would already think, "OK, they already have so much on their plates, they already are responsible for so much, this isn't something we should add to them" but I feel like they just think 'OK, well, I don't even know who they 'they' is, but "They're the person who is in front of the classroom." We're so much more than that, and to me it makes me feel like they just don't take our role as serious as it is.

Jessica: [Decision-makers] who are not teachers are the "they." That's who "they" is.

Pre-service teachers viewed proposed policy as not just the outcome of a set of social values but actively creating a social value itself: one that framed teachers as expendable. One pre-service teacher argued, "They don't see teachers as valuable. [Even though] they're acknowledging by saying 'Maybe we should arm them with guns,' that our lives are in danger." Another responded, "They don't even care about our lives, they care about the students' lives."

Participants noted the ways in which the policy, even in the form of a proposal, served to cut off other viable policy responses to the threat of school shootings. Research recommendations point to training for teachers and administrators in recognizing serious and credible threats (Borum et. al, 2010) and to societal structures to block juveniles from obtaining weapons (May, 2004). Sofia said, "It feels like proposals like [arming teachers] are crazy on purpose, to make it hard to talk about other options that might actually stop bad things from happening." In particular, participants raised the topic of gun control and expressed disbelief and discouragement that past school shootings had not resulted in meaningful national policy change. John stated, "I don't think there's anything that you can really do to prevent [a shooting] from happening in the school building except for gun control and limiting the number of guns and broader gun legislation. I feel strongly about that." Though pre-service teachers took a variety of stances on gun control as a whole, they agreed that the proposal to arm teachers eclipsed other responses to the policy problem and effectively narrowed the conversation. One elementary pre-service teacher stated, "I know gun control is basically thought of as impossible now. But don't put that on me and my students."

School Shooting Policies and Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher Policy Advocacy

Participants identified few opportunities to effect change in existing school shooting policies within their districts or schools or elsewhere. Faced with the possibility of new proposed measures such as that of arming teachers, they saw opting out of teaching in districts with such policies as their most realistic option. Brendan was the only participant to equivocate. He stated clearly that he was not necessarily in favor of the proposal to arm teachers, but simply that if he were asked to do so as part of his professional responsibilities, he would not refuse. He explained, "I mean, I'd do it. I'd rather it be me than someone else who had to do it." All but Brendan stated that they would look elsewhere for employment rather than comply with a mandated policy of being armed in the classroom. Caterina stated, "I'd be the teacher that would say, I'm not doing it. I have a choice, right? It's not mandatory. I don't want to do it." Despite their deep desire to be teachers, and in spite of their need for employment immediately after graduation, all the participants with the exception of Brendan stated that they would consider work outside of the teaching profession rather than take up a weapon in their classroom.

Participants felt resigned to accept existing school policies. They interpreted policies implementing school resource officers and other security measures as representative of schools' immutable attitudes towards school shooting safety and reflective of entrenched national attitudes towards gun control. At the federal and state level, they felt ineffective; at the local level they were concerned about their marketability if they were to speak out directly in favor or against any school policies. In particular, they cited the need for paid work immediately after graduation as a major factor in the likelihood that they would adhere to existing school safety policies. Two students had the following exchange:

Brittany: I wish I could say that if a school makes students open up their lockers for random checks, I'd say 'Keep your job,' but I am not in a position to do that. I have to have a job after graduation.

Brendan: Right. I have to pick my battles, kind of, because as a first-year teacher, I don't feel safe to just say whatever.

Participants saw their options for involvement in school shooting policy as limited to individual interpretation of existing policy (or lack thereof), as modeled by their supervising practitioners' development of ad hoc plans for school shootings. However, processes of interpretation and sensemaking were not made visible or transparent by their supervising practitioners, nor did the pre-service teachers ask for explicit guidance. Pre-service teachers did not see models for other forms of

policy involvement whether in terms of taking on an active role in the design of new, alternative policies, or advocacy for policy change. They knew of no practicing teacher who was active in policy design or advocacy related to school safety or any other key policy issue. Furthermore, pre-service teachers reported receiving little guidance in their teacher education coursework around teacher policy involvement in any dimension (Hara, 2017) around contemporary educational issues.

Pre-service teachers saw the gap between their concerns and existing policy responses to the threat of school shootings as an unsettling but ultimately unchangeable reality of teaching. Six out of the seven participants had come of age in the United States and completed the majority of their schooling in the post-Columbine era. “Yeah, it’s kind of like it’s always been something you knew could happen in a school,” one of the elementary-grade pre-service teachers explained. Another pre-service teacher, who at 20 years old had been a very young child at the time of the Columbine shootings and in middle school when the Sandy Hook shootings took place, said “Most of us here have grown up hearing this stuff in the news, you know? What’s going to change now? I wouldn’t even know how to be the one who makes anything different on a policy level. I don’t know how to do that.”

Discussion

Pre-service teachers in this study were deeply concerned about gun violence in schools. Regardless of differences in race, gender, or the size, location and demographics of their placement site, all participants felt vulnerability and concern about the possibility of school shootings. They viewed existing school policies around potential shootings as ineffective at best, damaging to their relationships with students, and out of step with teachers’ concerns. They saw an impact of these policies on their practice, both in terms of their pedagogy and their relationships with students. They interpreted current and proposed policies as undermining the value of teachers in contemporary society. Constrained by limited professional development around policy involvement and little policy guidance in their school sites regarding school shootings, pre-service teachers expressed significant doubts about their ability to effect meaningful policy change. Though specific to districts in Eastern and Central Massachusetts, these findings bear implications for pre-service teachers’ experiences across the country, not only with regard to school shooting policies but also with respect to pre-service teachers’ policy involvement as a whole.

School Shooting Policy

Policies function on multiple levels: as text, as discourse, and as practice. The concept of policy as discourse manifested itself in multiple ways in participants experiences with school shooting policy. Policy as discourse projects images of the ideal society and educational system (Vidovich, 2001). Institutions and governments adopt and enact policy in order to regulate behavior in concordance with social norms and values (Gildersleeve, 2013). Pre-service teachers interpreted existing school policy solutions around shootings such as security personnel as further contributing to punitive schooling practices disproportionately impacting students of color and an additional threat to the key relationship-building element of teaching. Participants were fully aware of discursive conditions including ongoing public debate about arming teachers as a possible policy response to school shootings. They understood the proposal to signal a fundamental distortion of the professional responsibilities of teaching and an undervaluing of the role of teacher in society.

The proposed policy to arm teachers exercised power before even being adopted (Stone, 2002). The proposal produced the “truth” that arming teachers would make schools safer, and that using a weapon for the protection of students is part of the teacher’s central responsibility

(Gildersleeve, 2013). Participants interpreted the proposal and others like it as limiting the scope of other possible policy responses that might be legitimately proposed. Even in proposal form, policy “changes the possibilities we have for thinking otherwise” (Ball, 1993). Pre-service teachers’ formative experiences as students growing up in a post-Columbine era combined with their experiences while apprentices served to normalize the status quo of school shooting policies in public schools.

Policy texts, or the official legislative documents, are dynamic and open to interpretation; the result of compromise, they reflect existing societal relationships, power dynamics, and inequalities. The connections between policy texts and existing power relationships in society changes dynamics between actors and shifts the balance between constraint and agency (Ball, 1993). The official school shooting policy texts in this study were either absent or unevenly implemented in schools, despite the level of concern held by pre-service and in-service teachers. Certain school documents referenced drills as an additional means of preparing for the threat of school shootings, an approach that was neither appealing to pre-service teachers nor implemented in actual practice. As Beilharz (1987) argues, “policy is important, not the least because it consists of texts which are (sometimes) acted on” (p. 394). The majority of participants had not read the actual policy documents, nor were mentions of policies such as lockdown drills necessarily implemented in practice, but policies remained nonetheless textual interventions into practice (Ball, 1993).

Finally, policy as practice consists of how policy texts and discourse are implemented and enacted (Heck, 2004). Policy as practice is where teachers, as “street-level bureaucrats,” are most likely to be active in the policy pipeline (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1978). Participants observed teachers developing informal protocols with their colleagues to address perceived silences in official policy, but key aspects of teacher sensemaking remained opaque. Pre-service teachers were not confident in their understanding of policy as practice or their ability to implement a school shooting policy were an event to occur and did not feel empowered to ask for explicit instruction in how to address their concerns. In the context of the social problem of school shootings, pre-service teachers drew limited power and privilege while potentially absorbing a significant impact of the problem and its proposed solutions.

Conclusion and Implications for Policy

That pre-service teachers felt powerless to effect change within and without their school buildings must be addressed. Of course, teachers are active in the policy process (Spillane et al., 2002) and engage as policy actors (Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011). However, pedagogical practice is most effective when learned in practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Zeichner, 2010), and novice and veteran teachers alike rarely participate directly in the policy design or advocacy. Institutional change is needed; without coursework or professional training in policy work, pre-service teachers are not prepared to be fully engaged in all facets of policymaking, nor to view themselves as having the potential to be policy actors. Teacher education programs must recognize policy knowledge as central to teaching and integrate coursework in educational policy into the standard teacher education curriculum. Teacher educators and practicing teachers must work collaboratively with pre-service teachers to observe, interrogate and practice policy early and often in the field through formalized collaboration (Good, et al., 2017). To contribute to structural and normative change, both teacher educators and practicing teachers must embrace and assert their own identities as policy actors, identities that are integral to rather than separate from their self-image as teachers. Modeling these identities in practice allows pre-service teachers, too, to believe policy engagement to be fundamental to teaching.

Policy is directly related to the structures, processes, and outcomes of education. When teachers feel removed from policy design or advocacy from the very beginning of their careers, it becomes more challenging for them to motivate meaningful change impacting schools, students, teachers, and the profession. This has consequences for teaching and learning within school buildings, but also for the educational policy process and the effectiveness of policy as a whole. This is particularly critical in the case of policies directly impacting students' and teachers' lives. Educational policies are less likely to reflect the needs of all stakeholders, to be implemented with fidelity, and to address the societal problems to which they are intended to respond without the meaningful, informed participation of teachers at all stages of the process. Meaningful, effective school shooting policies must include the voices of pre-service and in-service teachers.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol #1

Background information

- (1) Please tell me about yourself.
Probes: What is your educational background? What was your own schooling experience like?
- (2) What motivated you to go into teaching?

Professional identity and vision

- (3) How do you define your professional vision as a teacher?
Probes: What influences this professional vision? How does this vision influence your teaching?
- (4) What do you think are the purposes of teaching? What makes you say that? Can you give specific examples?

Attitudes about teaching for justice

- (5) How do you define the concept of justice? Why informs this definition?
- (6) What are your thoughts about the idea of teaching for justice?
Probes: What social problems can you identify that might be relevant here?
What do you think are teachers' roles and responsibilities with respect to social change?
- (7) What evidence, if any, have you gotten from your coursework to confirm or challenge the idea that teaching towards a more just society is one of the primary purposes of education?
- (8) What evidence, if any, have you gotten from your field placement(s) to confirm or challenge the idea that teaching towards a more just society is one of the primary purposes of education?

Participation in the discussion group

- (9) How do envision the process of engaging on these topics in the study group? Probes: Do you have specific goals? Specific concerns?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol #2

Professional identity and vision

- (1) Has your professional vision as a teacher changed over the course of the semester? Why or why not? In what ways?
- (2) Has your view of the purposes of teaching changed over the course of the semester? Why or why not? In what ways?
Probes: influences, beliefs, embodied practices, key policies

Attitudes about teaching for justice

- (3) How do you define the concept of justice now? Why?
Probes: influences, beliefs, embodied practices, key policies
- (4) What do you think about the idea of teaching for justice now?
Probes: influences, beliefs, embodied practices, key policies

Experiences with teaching for justice and educational policies

- (5) What evidence, if any, did you get from your coursework this semester to confirm or challenge the idea that teaching towards a more just society is one of the primary purposes of education?
Probes: supports, constraints, opportunities, embodied practice
- (6) What evidence, if any, did you get from your field placement this semester to confirm or challenge the idea that teaching towards a more just society is one of the primary purposes of education?
Probes: supports, constraints, opportunities, embodied practice

Participation in the discussion group

- (7) What was the process of participating in the group like for you? What do you think are the benefits or constraints of this model of thinking about teaching and learning?
- (8) Did you meet your stated goals?
- (9) How did your stated concerns, if any, play out?

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