Chapter 17
Will Teachers Shoot?
An Analysis of the Prospects of Arming Classroom Teachers in an Attempt to Stop School Shootings

Howard A. Kurtz
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9379-5145
Southwestern Oklahoma State University, USA

ABSTRACT
The question “will teachers shoot?” is a neglected issue central to the discussions of how to make our schools safer. Arming faculty may seem like a cheap solution, but it is one that needs refinement and a deeper understanding. What if research shows that most faculty will not shoot no matter the threat or that only certain people will under certain circumstances? This of course says nothing about their level of expertise or non-existent predictions about positive and negative outcomes. Teachers are the experts in this area and their voices need to be heard. Some portray teachers as protective, loving, self-sacrificing heroes who will willingly put their lives on the line for their students. A more realistic view may be one of teachers as professional employees who are under no obligation to risk their lives for the students they teach or the institutions they serve.

INTRODUCTION

The question “will teachers shoot” is a new and certainly a neglected issue central to the discussions of how to make our schools safer. Arming faculty may seem like a cheap and immediate solution to the problem but it is an option that needs objective consideration and a great deal of refinement.

Much research and literature exist that deal with legislative and philosophical issues surrounding the idea of arming teachers. Those discussions though important are not relevant to the ideas discussed in this chapter since they address policy issues and legal concerns not the behavioral issues examined here. In other words, we can pass laws that would allow pigs to fly and regulate their airways but if we neglect that fact that they can’t or won’t take to the air we may be wasting our time with legal and philosophical discussions that will bear no fruit.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0113-9.ch017
The literature is limited in this area due to the simple fact that it is such a new issue that data and scientific studies have not accumulated at this point in time. It is hoped that the ideas and information contained in this chapter contribute to developing arguments and theories on this important issue.

Attempts to fix problems through laws and legislative decrees have failed time and again when we fail to first examine and fully understand the social and cultural behavioral dynamics and realities. A prime example of this is Larry Sherman’s experimental results with mandatory arrests and domestic violence. His proposals seemed logical until research emerged that the policy actually made matters worse. (Muhlhausen, 2014) Had his research focused more on the social cultural behavioral dynamics of domestic abuse in the design stage the outcomes might have been more positive.

The idea of arming teachers must at least stand on the idea that teachers are brave loving protectors of their students. This is a noble view reminiscent of the concept of Parens Patriae where we assume that teachers are charged to act as parents in the parents place. Shouldn’t we first understand how teachers themselves feel about risking their lives for students? We need to develop a deeper understanding of this commonly held logic that teachers care so much about their students that they will step into the line of fire if called upon.

After many casual conversations with teachers my observation is that many of us who have spent our careers in academia do not see “protection of our students extending into life threatening situations.” In other words, they might not shoot nor get involved. There are of course many ethical and legal issues that are probably best debated elsewhere but first we need to answer the question, if schools should ask teachers or staff to risk their lives in what amounts to a law enforcement role will those teachers shoot to defend themselves and their students? If they do shoot, what are the outcomes and consequences likely to be.

Will parents bring lawsuits against schools and governmental entities if a teacher makes a mistake with a weapon? Will the teachers hit their intended targets, or will they become heroic examples for us all?

Legislation can be proposed and passed, and teachers unions and school districts may develop guidelines and policies on this topic but if teachers refuse to shoot efforts to address mass shooting with armed teachers will likely fail. The ethical and legal issues are worth the debate, but the end result of those debates is insignificant if large numbers of teachers won’t shoot. By “shoot” we mean will they use a firearm, pull the trigger or fire, wound or kill another in self-defense of themselves and their students?

What if research can be shown that most faculty will not shoot no matter the threat or that only certain people will under certain circumstances? The author is principal investigator of an ongoing state-wide study that is currently addressing this issue. Those results will be forth coming in a future publication, but the discussion needs to begin here.

An important safety issue is at the center of this. Do we really want students and parents to proceed with their lives under a false sense of security? Should everyone blindly go on thinking that armed teachers will protect them when we have no research to support that idea? Is it fair to say that some protection is better than none? What if innocents are killed by friendly fire or what if teachers freeze or refuse to defend the school? Even trained individuals fail to act in school shooting incidents. Scot Peterson the armed security guard in the Parkland shootings had been trained that officers responding to an active shooter must “immediately go to confront the shooter” and “move directly and quickly toward known threat. “Instead he sheltered in a building 75 feet away from the action. (Oppel, 2019).

Criminal Justice professionals around the country are seeking ways to end and/or thwart active school shootings. Much has been written about arming professors and teachers as a way to combat mass shootings. But little is known about teachers armed level of expertise and studies on positive and negative outcomes are practically non-existent Literature exists dealing with past, extant, and/or proposed
Related Content

Environmental and Corporate Crimes: The Case of Polluting Industries in France
www.igi-global.com/chapter/environmental-and-corporate-crimes/241476?camid=4v1a

Childhood Sexual Abuse and Violence
www.igi-global.com/chapter/childhood-sexual-abuse-and-violence/197822?camid=4v1a

Mass Killings Past, Present, and Future
www.igi-global.com/chapter/mass-killings-past-present-and-future/238563?camid=4v1a

Distinct Aspects of Systematic Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War and Their Implications for the Victims’ Needs in Transitional Justice
www.igi-global.com/chapter/distinct-aspects-of-systematic-sexual-violence-as-a-weapon-of-war-and-their-implications-for-the-victims-needs-in-transitional-justice/222362?camid=4v1a