

Caught in the Crosshairs: How Zero Tolerance Policies Force Educators to Violate
Professional Codes of Ethics

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Abstract

Over the course of the previous two decades, state legislatures and local educational authorities have responded to calls for increased school safety in the wake of such highly publicized school shootings as Columbine and Red Lake High Schools through the passage of “Zero Tolerance” legislation. These laws, predicated upon the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, typically call for penalties ranging from school suspension to processing in the legal system for a student threatening or perceived to be threatening an act of violence towards members of a school community. While proponents of Zero Tolerance policies claim implementation of these regulations have led to decreases in the incidences of violent school crime, these perceived benefits have come at a considerable cost to educators in terms of their ethical responsibilities to the students for whom they are responsible. Frequently, the demands placed upon educators in the name of maintaining school safety oblige educators to curtail student expression, silence dissenting opinions, limit instructional opportunities, and even discriminate against students from different backgrounds who may express their thoughts and feelings through expression school officials may regard as threatening. In this paper, I will examine how Zero Tolerance policies force teachers and administrators to violate not only the ethics of care inherent in the educational environment, but I will discuss how these policies undermine the tenets established in applied ethical codes like the NEA Code of Ethics of the Education Profession.

Introduction

There is little question regarding the importance society attaches to the provision of safe learning environments in America's schools. Indeed, the citizens of California went so far as to guarantee the right to violence-free schools under Article I, Section 28 of their state Constitution (California Constitution, n.d.). Moreover, issues involving school safety have become increasingly salient in the wake of high-profile incidences involving school shootings in middle and secondary schools as well as, more recently, in institutions of higher education. State legislatures and local educational authorities have responded to calls for increased vigilance in schools by passing "Zero Tolerance" laws designed to allow school officials to act quickly and decisively when faced with a potentially violent situation on their campuses (Demerle, 2001). While there are some variations in the definitions of what constitutes a Zero Tolerance policy, they may be generally characterized by what La Morte (2008) refers to as a "one-strike-you're out" (p. 149) policy that requires severe punishments for any infraction of school safety rules with neither mitigating circumstances considered nor exceptions allowed (Rutherford Institute, 2003a).

While the impetus behind these school safety policies is well-intentioned, the effect on teaching and instruction has been chilling. Optimally, schools should provide safe environments where students and educators engage in intellectual growth through the expression and exchange of thoughts, opinions, feelings, and ideas necessary to

build the critical thinking and reasoning skills deemed vital for personal and professional success in the society of the twenty-first century. Instead, as William Ayers (2004) observed,

Zero Tolerance policies, which have swept the country in the last decade, fueled in part by highly publicized school shootings and morphing quickly to embrace a host of issues beyond weapons, create the conditions for exclusion from our schools of large numbers of youth, especially poor and working class kids, students of color, the children of certain immigrant groups, the disabled and the marginal, the officially or traditionally despised. Criminal justice metaphors and practices are embraced, and the great humanizing mission of education is lost. Classrooms become sterile and one-dimensional places devoid of teachable moments: Every misbehavior warrants a trip to the office, teacher judgment and wisdom are curtailed, administrators become adjuncts to the police, and schools become narrower, narrower, narrower, until they are nothing more than little training prisons (p. 25).

In schools where Zero Tolerance has morphed from policy to philosophy, increasing numbers of children and adolescents—especially students of color, males, and students with special needs—are becoming increasingly isolated from learning opportunities and experience a heightened risk of becoming part of the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Even youth who do not exhibit any characteristics embodied in an at risk profile are falling victim to Zero Tolerance penalties for offenses that heretofore would have been

handled by school officials and would have resulted in neither suspension, expulsion, nor entry into the criminal justice system. Ironically, current research indicates that Zero Tolerance has not proven to be the deterrent to school violence its supporters and policymakers had hoped (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006).

For all the collateral damage incurred by students through the policy perversions resulting from the misapplication of Zero Tolerance policies, they are not the only victims. Teachers are the school stakeholders with the most direct and prolonged exposure to students, and they are inextricably involved in Zero Tolerance policies, their implementation, and the attendant consequences. Often, it is the teachers who, based on what they see, hear, interpret, or perceive, initiate the processes outlined in the various school and district Zero Tolerance policies. Inarguably, there are times when teacher intervention is critical in order to maintain a safe and orderly learning environment as there are students who do pose real and creditable threats to school communities. In many instances, however, teachers contribute to the misapplication of Zero Tolerance policies through, among other things, inaccurate threat assessments often based more on racial/gender/cultural stereotypes than on research-based methodology and training (APA Zero Tolerance Taskforce, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2006). They either deliberately or unwittingly undermine the element of trust needed not only for student intellectual and personal development but also for maintaining lines of communication that are important for preventing actual threats to school security from taking place (Newman, 2004). Furthermore, many teachers have altered their instruction to prevent the expression or exchange of ideas that may be deemed

sufficiently controversial as to be actionable under Zero Tolerance policies (Simmons, 2007). Thus, when teachers undertake the aforementioned actions to provide an atmosphere of security where instruction can occur, they all too often isolate and exclude those students most in need of positive adult connections (Robbins, 2005).

Exacerbating matters surrounding teacher implementation of Zero Tolerance policies in schools is the ethical dilemma in which teachers find themselves when they attempt to implement these procedures. As Kenneth Strike (2007) observed, education is optimally an inclusive process, reaching as many people in society as possible. Moreover, teachers have the dual ethical obligation not only to act in a beneficent manner, but they also are required to avoid malfeasance at all costs (Grubbs, 2008). When teachers are involved in the Zero Tolerance process and its attendant exclusionary processes, they place themselves in situations where they act in a contradictory manner to the canons of such professional ethical codes as the National Education Association's (NEA) Code of Ethics of the Education Profession and the ethics of care that characterize the educator's obligations to the students. In this paper, I will begin providing a brief history of Zero Tolerance policies and the disadvantages these policies pose when they are vaguely written and misapplied. Next, I will use the framework of the ethics of care to demonstrate how Zero Tolerance policies force teachers to violate their obligations to students as outlined in the NEA Code of Ethics for the Education Profession. Finally, I will discuss ways for educators to maintain the ethic of care for their students while helping to maintain a safe school environment.

A Brief Overview of Zero Tolerance Policies

Legislative History

Despite the public perception that Zero Tolerance legislation is a relatively recent development in education policy, the origins of these policies may be traced to a sharp rise in the juvenile violent crime rate in the late nineteen-eighties and early nineteen-nineties, especially among minority youths in the inner cities (Cook and Laub, 1998). In response, Congress passed the Gun Free Schools Act of 1990, which regulated who may carry firearms on school property and mandated federal sanctions for the unauthorized presence of guns on or near campus (Gun-Free School Zone Act of 1990). Although this legislation was ultimately held to be unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court (North Central Regional Library, n.d.), the subsequent Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 passed judicial review by requiring states to establish laws mandating a minimum one year expulsion for students found guilty of possessing a weapon on school property or risk the loss of federal education funds. The Act allowed local educational authorities to provide educational services to suspended students in an alternative setting, and exceptions were permitted on a case-by case basis. The Act's provisions also allowed for compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994).

Following the enactment of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, state and local educational authorities nationwide began to develop policies that mandated Zero

Tolerance towards student violations of drug and weapons policies. According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2006), "94% of all schools have Zero Tolerance policies for weapons or firearms, 87% for alcohol, while 79% report mandatory suspensions or expulsions for violence or tobacco" (p. 25).

Education officials intended for Zero Tolerance to ensure that schools were safe learning environments while providing a mechanism so that teachers could teach their students how to interact appropriately according to the accepted mores of society. When viewed in terms of safety and character education, Zero Tolerance policies enjoyed support from school stakeholders, parents, policymakers, and the larger communities. For example, the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2006) indicated 93% of teachers and 88% of parents believed that schools should help students learn socialization skills so that they may be successful and productive members of society, while programs like New York City's "SafeSchools Initiative" claimed a 16% reduction in school violence as a result of policies designed to increase police presence and remove threatening students from the city's most troubled schools (City of New York, 2002).

Widening the Net: The Problems Posed by Vague and Overbroad Zero Tolerance Policies

As states sought to comply with the federal statute, they broadened the scope of their anti-school violence laws to include sanctioning students who threatened violence, and policymakers considerably—but in a non-specific manner—expanded the categories of weapons covered beyond the firearms indicated under the federal law. For example, the New York code addressing school violence contains a section under Article 65

stating that a student would face mandatory expulsion if he or she “threatens, while on school district property, to use any instrument that appears capable of causing physical injury or death” (New York Education Law, 2007). Although these laws appear to be well-intentioned in their objective to provide safe schools for educators and students, the breadth and the vagueness of the state statutes and the local Zero Tolerance policies deriving from them were important contributors to the ensuing difficulties associated with these policies and their implementation.

In the aftermath of Columbine and other school shootings, Zero Tolerance policies were expanded to cover speech and other forms of expression deemed by school officials to be threatening (Newman, 2004) whether on campus or in the virtual environment of the internet (*Wisniewski v. Board of Education*, 2007). This expansion in the scope of Zero Tolerance policies presents several problems. To begin, the determination for what constitutes threatening speech in many cases is not clear and is replete with exceptions. As a result, many educators are unable to accurately determine what actually constitutes threatening speech and what would not meet the legal standards of the Threat Doctrine as outlined by the United States Supreme Court (Salgado, 2005). When school officials fail to accurately assess the threat potential involving student expression and Zero Tolerance policies, school districts and the laws become vulnerable to public criticism for acts such as suspending students for threatening to shoot wads of paper, singing song parodies deemed to be threatening, or drawing Confederate flags on school grounds. Not only do many of these misapplications of threat analysis fail to meet the standards of judicial review, but they

undermine the public's confidence in the local education authority's ability to distinguish true threats from mere youthful expression (Rutherford Institute, 2003b).

Minorities, students with special needs, and males seem to be especially susceptible the misapplication of Zero Tolerance policies. Webb and Kritsonis (2006) found that although African-American students made up only 17% of the total enrollment in the nation's public schools, they accounted for 32% of all out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Claireborne (2000) found that Zero Tolerance penalties were applied more frequently to African American students than their white counterparts. Robbins (2005) observed that, in the case of minorities, teachers would enforce Zero Tolerance policies for such inconsequential actions as the rolling of the eyes, while the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2006) noted that teachers would refer Black students for subjective offenses such as loitering, threats, and disrespect while White students were referred for more easily documented offenses such as smoking, vandalism and obscene language. Additionally, Black students typically receive harsher and longer penalties than do White students for similar violations of school safety policies. Given the disparate treatment minorities receive under Zero Tolerance, it would not be unreasonable to argue that these policies reinforce both inaccurate profiling and the stereotypes upon which such profiles are based.

Students who have special needs may find themselves suspended or expelled from school under Zero Tolerance policies in violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Often, these students fall victim to Zero Tolerance due to their

ability to effectively filter what they say or do as they interact with their environments (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006). Although students with special needs may be removed temporarily from the school setting for limited periods of time, the extended time required to determine whether a student's violent behavior was a manifestation of a disability and to establish a change of placement represents a substantial loss of educative and rehabilitative opportunities. Furthermore, students who have not yet been determined to be eligible for services under IDEA have a right to protection under the law until their status is determined, yet these same students may be suspended under current Zero Tolerance policies due to the immediacy and the inflexibility of these laws (Yell, 2006).

In terms of Zero Tolerance and gender, the propensity that boys have for externalizing behavior through verbalization and physical acts may contribute to the overrepresentation of males who are disciplined as threats to school safety (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006). Complicating matters for boys, Lesko (2001) argued that Zero Tolerance policies and their arbitrary application in schools tends to target adolescent males, reinforcing negative male stereotypes by changing the nature of high school from a venue for self-discovery to an institution with a pervasive prison-like mentality. When considered from this perspective, it is not surprising to find that males are more than four times as likely to be reported to school administration for infractions as girls and their punishments tend to be more severe for boys than for girls (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006).

Ironically, the expansion of Zero Tolerance policies to cover potentially threatening expression may very well discourage troubled students from seeking help. Salgado (2005) and Rabinowitz (2006) noted that many potentially violent students telegraph their intentions before they act; these warnings frequently take the form of written or spoken expression. While such troubled youth are in need of counseling, Zero Tolerance policies call for punishment and intake into the juvenile justice system. As a result, such students may be discouraged from disseminating written or spoken expressions of intent and thus denying officials the opportunity to avert a violent situation through immediate preventative action and/or counseling (Rabinowitz, 2006; Salgado, 2005; Newman, 2004). The inflexible and mandatory nature of Zero Tolerance policies, force educators and administrators to adhere with little exception to frequently unclear and poorly written policies (LaMorte, 2008) that frequently prevent them from taking alternative measures, rendering what would typically be regarded as “in house” disciplinary measures into a matter for suspension, expulsion, or law enforcement (Goodman, 2007). Hence, the very Zero Tolerance laws designed to empower school officials to act quickly and decisively to prevent school violence and maintain a safe learning environment may actually prevent these same officials from using their professional discretion and experience in dealing with the safety issues on their campuses while marginalizing and excluding not only the “good students” who accidentally fall afoul of Zero Tolerance, but criminalizing the students who may need positive educator influences the most.

The Teachers, the Ethics of Care and Zero Tolerance Policies

In common with most other “caring professions” such as nursing and the ministry, teachers have the dual ethical obligations of being beneficent (doing good) while refraining from maleficent behavior (those actions that are harmful) in relation to their students. These ethical requirements assume an added imperative when one considers that in most cases students possess far less power than teachers and have relatively little recourse to remedy or relief if the power relationship is abused (Grubbs, 2008; McLaren, 1998). Additionally, in their roles as leaders, instructors, developers, facilitators, and mentors, teachers are the providers of services to their students without regard to race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other demographic considerations (Grubbs, 2008). When teachers achieve the ethical standard of beneficence, they frequently do so through the caring relationships they establish with their students, which, in turn create safe, inclusive environments where learning can take place. When teachers misapply exclusionary Zero Tolerance policies in their classrooms, they undermine student trust, compromise student-teacher relationships that play an important role in maintaining a safe educational atmosphere (Rabinowitz, 2006), marginalize students who may need the positive influence of a caring teacher, and ultimately violate the ethics of care that are so essential to being a beneficent professional (McCray and Beachum, 2006).

The Ethics of Care

Obviously, the notions of caring and the importance of relationships have been extant for as long as humans have been on the face of the Earth. However, caring defined as an ethical paradigm is a relatively recent event (Held, 2006). Considered to be a branch of feminist ethics, the ethics of care is characterized by placing an emphasis on meeting the needs of those for whom a standard of care is required. Hence, the ethics of care involves the relationship between those who “care” and those who are “cared for” with the implied responsibilities for the respective parties (Held, 2006). This focus on relationships and the obligations for the caregiver and the subjects of care deemphasizes (but does not dispense with) the traditional principle-driven focus of more traditional, masculine ethical frameworks. As Noddings (1998) noted, “Indeed, it is exactly in the most difficult situations that principles fail us. Thus, instead of turning to a principle for guidance, a carer turns to the cared for” (p.187). By extension, the ethics of care values emotional input into ethical decision making and rejects the notion abstract reasoning is the only way to arrive at sound decision making devoid of what Held (2006) described as “bias and arbitrariness” (p. 11). Perhaps most critically, the ethics of care focuses on the importance of moral education and how such education is conveyed through modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation (Noddings, 1998).

As applied to teachers, students and the school environment, the ethics of care should serve as a means to teach, to learn, to establish trust, and to establish community within the school (Noddings, 1998). This idea of community and the

relationships that serve as its anchor is important for school safety. If there are strong, trusting relationships between educators and the students with whom they work, then it is easier to establish an inclusive environment where all students feel they belong and that they matter as people. In a caring, inclusive environment, students who may otherwise be isolated, marginalized, judged, and/or excluded can be exposed to positive adult role models whose influence can be a critical factor in helping otherwise troubled students find the path to success and fulfillment. Under the guidance of educators who practice the ethics of care, potentially at-risk students can experience what it is like to belong to a group, learn how to socialize with others, have their thoughts and emotions acknowledged and valued, and know what it is like to have their behaviors affirmed and to affirm others. While the previous observation may strike some as overly sentimental, evidence indicates that more than one school shooter felt alienated and stigmatized in the school setting and that teachers, as well as fellow students, contributed to the feelings and frustrations that led the shooters to take action (Rabinowitz, 2006; Newman, 2004).

Poorly conceived and misapplied Zero Tolerance policies often force teachers to violate the ethics of care that plays such an important role in both meeting the educator's ethical obligation to be beneficent and in helping to provide a safe school community. Policies that force untrained teachers to assess threats based on what they perceive lay the foundations for mistrust and close the avenues of communication needed to avert real threats to school safety (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2006). Trusting, inclusive relationships become the dichotic, adversarial

relationships that the ethics of care eschews (Noddings, 1998), and students—both at-risk and not—fall victim to principle-based rules that make no allowances for circumstances and deny educators the right of using their professional expertise, knowledge of students, experience, or common sense. To make matters worse, since teachers frequently base their decisions regarding threat assessment on cultural biases and stereotypes, Zero Tolerance contributes to the violation of the ethics of care through the reinforcement of profiling, the disproportionately harsh treatment that minorities and other groups receive due to this type of labeling, the exclusion from the school community that often results in entry into the “school to prison pipeline,” and the destruction of the potential to form the necessary beneficial relationships between the teachers as caregiver and the students in need of care (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006; McCray and Beachum, 2006; Rabinowitz, Robbins, 2005; 2006; Robbins, 2005). In short, when teachers wrongly enforce flawed Zero Tolerance policies, they move from the realm of the beneficent educator to the maleficent oppressor of children.

NEA Code of Ethics of the Education Profession

The current National Education Association (NEA) Code of Ethics of the Education Profession can trace its origins to the first version of the code adopted by the NEA in 1929 (Yeaman, 2005). The Code, in its present 1975 iteration, calls for ethical educators to recognize the “magnitude of the responsibility inherent in the teaching process,” and believe in the “worth, and dignity of each human being, recognizes the importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of the

democratic principles” (NEA Code of Ethics for the Education Profession, 1975, para. 1-2). The NEA Code of Ethics is important to educators because its canons represent the first national code of ethics for educators and it serves as the template for codes of educator ethics in several states as well as for other professional organizations (Yeaman, 2005; Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2002).

The NEA Code of Ethics is divided into two sections or principles: Commitment to the Student, Commitment to the Profession. The principle regarding professional commitment to the student is of particular interest, for although the NEA Code of Ethics preceded the identification of a formalized framework for the ethics of care, the Code does exhibit dispositions inherent in the ethics of care paradigm. The sections contained in the Commitment to the Student Principle illustrate the ethical and pedagogical relevance of establishing the positive, trust-based relationships needed for the type of safe, inclusive environment called for in the NEA Code (1975). Interestingly, section six of this principle addresses the very issues that place teachers in dilemmas regarding following Zero Tolerance policies and meeting their ethical obligations to their students. Specifically, section six states that the educator,

Shall not on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation, unfairly--

- a. Exclude any student from participation in any program
- b. Deny benefits to any student

c. Grant any advantage to any student (NEA Code of Ethics of the Education Profession,

1975, para. 5)

The nature of Zero Tolerance policies and the lack of teacher training in implementing these regulations, however, forces educators to engage in actions which discriminate against students based on presumptions, profiles, and stereotypes (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006; McCray and Beachum, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2006, Robbins, 2005). As a result, these students—who are often minority, male, or have special learning needs—face ramifications that exclude them from classroom education, deny them access to counseling services, reduce exposure to positive adult role models, and make it difficult to learn the socialization skills needed for appropriate interactions in society. When educators are forced to abandon their ethical obligations to care for their students due to mandates calling for them to act in the role of law enforcement, even the most troubled students are victimized and school safety becomes more problematic. Ironically, since Zero Tolerance policies have the potential to make schools less safe, they put well-meaning educators in the position of violating section four of the NEA Code: “the educator ...Shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety” (NEA Code of Ethics of the Education Profession, 1975, para. 5).

Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies and Discussion

Alternatives to current Zero Tolerance policies do exist, many of which would entail relatively little new expense, yet allow educators to restore the trusting, open

relationships that serve as foundations to the ethics of care and school safety. New approaches to school safety would allow teachers to meet their ethical obligation of beneficences and satisfy the requirements of professional ethical behavior. Newman (2004) argues that in the place of inflexible and overbroad Zero Tolerance policies, school officials should be permitted “the capacity to make nuanced judgments” (p.288) that would help reinforce student trust of school officials and encourage a more open communication between students and educators. These ideas of student trust and communication play critical roles in helping identify troubled students who actually pose a potential threat to school safety. Newman recommends that educators respect the confidentiality of communications between students and school officials in order to encourage student trust, increase the communication between parents and the schools, especially during middle school, and to use school resource officers present in schools as a resource to intercept potential threats for violence so students may come to understand that the school officials take student communications seriously.

Salgado (2005) calls for more effective professional development aimed at implementing threat analysis. The United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education (2002) have developed a program to train school officials to more accurately assess perceived threats to safety on school campuses. The program is centered on 11 essential questions that school officials must consider in evaluating a perceived threat: (1) What are the student’s motives and goals?; (2) Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or the intent to attack?; (3) Has the subject shown inappropriate interest in school violence or school attackers?; (4) Has the student

engaged in attack-related behaviors?; (5) Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted aggression?; (6) Is the student experiencing depression or a sense of hopelessness?; (7) Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?; (8) Does the student see violence as an acceptable way to resolve issues?; (9) Is the student's conversation consistent with his or her actions?; (10) Are other people concerned with the student's potential for violent actions?; (11) What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack? (United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2002). The provision of training in asking the appropriate questions, gathering relevant data, and making informed decisions based on the findings would enable school officials to better determine which students were actually threats to security. Additionally, educators who are better prepared to assess threats can reduce reliance upon stereotype-driven profiling, ensnare fewer innocent children in overbroad Zero Tolerance policies, save the district from embarrassing media attention and legal costs, and would mitigate the discriminatory effects of current school safety policies.

The organization Fight Crime Invest in Kids (2008) proposes four actions to help reduce violent crime in schools and mitigate the need for the Zero Tolerance policies currently in place. The organization argues for increased access to pre-kindergarten and early educational activities due to the correlation between early education and the reduced tendency to engage in delinquent behavior. Second, Fight Crime Invest in Kids calls for identifying and assisting "at-risk" parents in order to prevent child abuse and neglect. Intervention and coaching programs would be provided through child care

services. Third, provide all children and teens access to quality after school programs, and, finally, identify troubled teens as early as possible and assist both the teens and their parents with the training/counseling necessary to prevent the teens from becoming involved with crime.

The Fight Crime Invest in Kids Program is particularly attractive for several reasons. First, since the organization is composed of law enforcement officials from across the country, adopting the organization's program would ensure support from the nation's law enforcement establishment and strengthen positive collaboration that could conceivably replace the "school to prison pipeline" that results from current Zero Tolerance policies. Second, the plan addresses the potential underlying issues that lead to school violence and proposes early preventative measures, thus treating the cause of school violence rather than responding to symptomatic actions. Finally, the Fight Crime Invest in Kids plan is not retributive in nature, thus providing the opportunity for an inclusive approach that uses education, trust, care, and strong relationships to teach students how to appropriately interact with peers and adults as opposed to the instant practice of isolation, stigmatization, and criminalization through Zero Tolerance options.

While there are other alternatives to Zero Tolerance policies, the aforementioned options illustrate how policy options can help restore the ethic of care to school environments while providing safety for educators and students alike. Rather than relying on punitive regulations that channel marginalized students out of the educational system and into the juvenile justice system, programs that emphasize education, early

intervention, the maintenance of meaningful lines of communications among school stakeholders, and the fostering of caring relationships between adults and students can reduce the elements of alienation and victimization that are risk factors in school safety today and more effectively allow teachers and school officials to establish the safe classrooms called for in professional codes of teacher ethics. If more schools opted to enact policies that embraced inclusion and the ethic of care, then perhaps not so ironically, they might better achieve the very objectives current Zero Tolerance policies try and fail to accomplish.

Conclusion

The philosopher Hannah Arendt (1968) defined education, in part, as ... the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token to save it from that ruin, which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. An education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their choice of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.

If schools persist in punitive Zero Tolerance policies that undermine relationships, discriminate against students, and exclude them from caring adults and nurturing environments, then Arendt's hopes for what educated youth could accomplish will be

little more than a pipe dream for a significant portion of the student population. Likewise, if teachers are forced to sacrifice the ethics of care and their professional ethical obligation to be beneficent to act as wardens for misguided and ineffectual Zero Tolerance policies, then there may well be no common world to renew, but rather an increasingly fragmented, polarized, and hostile society with which to cope instead. If we, as educators and as humans, truly wish the best for all of our students, we would do well to embrace the ethics of care and the ethical sensibilities embodied in our professional ethical codes. Only when we can truly care for all of our students can we hope to be safe.

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