

Media Discourses: The Cultural Forum of School Shootings

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My first semester of community college teaching was marked by a horrific incident: an active shooter entered our campus and killed multiple members of our staff. This tragedy, amidst the ever-presence of school shootings, urges us as educators to reconsider how to best serve our students. My position in this roundtable thus centers less on the media's framing of school shootings and rather on our role as educators given our current landscape. I will focus on building a safe and inclusive classroom, the so-called "flipped classroom" approach, and several areas of concern.

Engaging students in conversations about school shootings is essential to best serve the needs of diverse student populations. The classroom is often the first and only opportunity for students to have their voices heard. Identity and intersectionality are central to many media studies courses, and thus it is our responsibility to ensure that the diversity of identities is not only represented through on-screen examples and texts that we read, but the voices of students in our classrooms. Through forums, discussions, and debates, I have learned that many of my students experience gun violence in their neighborhoods regularly. For instance, one student recalled how his relative was shot in the face and killed in the street in front of him as he was mistaken for a rival gang member. Some of my students have been a part of mass shootings outside of my home campus as well. This summer a student retold the story of the phone call saying "goodbye" to her mother while running from the spray of bullets outside of the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas.

But where can we start? Building a safe and inclusive classroom is essential to having these discussions. We build this through the interactions we have with our students and they have with each other. Simply saying "good morning" or "how are you today?" may seem like a simple (and even unnecessary) greeting, but for some we are the first and only people that they will speak with that day. Acknowledging their presence shows students that they matter. How can I ask my students to tell the class how gun violence impacts their lives, when I haven't checked in with them at least once and said "hello"?

Second, adopting the so-called "flipped classroom" approach, which flips the typical cycle of material presentation and application, can be instrumental as it maximizes the time students can critically analyze, discuss, and debate difficult issues. For my courses, I create and post recorded, transcribed lectures and daily journal prompts to Canvas. The on-ground class time is primarily spent engaging in a deeper-level application of the day's topic. For example, I recently required students to watch Childish Gambino's "This is America" music video outside of class, read several analyses, and respond to questions about the lyrics and video content. The students brought their written responses to class the following day. Giving students more time to

reflect on the content and gather their thoughts lead to more students participating in the discussion, and a much richer conversation about race, gender, and gun violence in America. As a result of adopting this approach, not only has student performance dramatically improved, but students unanimously report feeling more engaged and appreciated than in a traditional lecture setting.

I am aware that this type of teaching is not for everyone. There is often reluctance and downright fear to engage students in conversations about gun violence, gun control, and violence in general. Some may feel underprepared or unprepared to facilitate these conversations. Some prefer a more distanced relationship with their students, where students know little to no personal information about the professor. Some are afraid of students crying, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, panic attacks, and verbal or physical violence ensuing. These are all valid concerns. My hope is that more schools will offer more than the necessary active shooter training (i.e., what to do in the case of an active shooter on your campus). We need more training, as educators, for how to handle the aftermath of school shootings (i.e., grief training, mental health training, pedagogy) in our classrooms.