



An Empty Seat in Class: Teaching and Learning After the Death of a Student

Rick Ayers

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The death of a student, especially to gun violence, is a life-changing experience that occurs with more and more frequency in America's schools. For each of these tragedies, there is a classroom and there is a teacher. Yet student death is often a forbidden subject, removed from teacher education and professional development classes where the curriculum is focused instead on learning about standards, lesson plans, and pedagogy. What can and should teachers do when the unbearable happens? *An Empty Seat in Class* illuminates the tragedy of student death and suggests ways of dealing and healing within the classroom community. This book weaves the story of the author's very personal experience of a student's fatal shooting with short pieces by other educators who have worked through equally terrible events and also includes contributions from counselors, therapists, and school principals. Through accumulated wisdom, educators are given the means and the resources to find their own path to healing their students, their communities, and themselves.

"A dreadful script had been written for our school and town (and the world) but this did not mean that a new script could not be written by us. We didn't have to subscribe to the tragic script beyond our control. It was time to rewrite."

—**Lee Keylock**, high school teacher, Sandy Hook, CT

"This book is a meditation on the unspeakable horror and ensuing anguish that follows the death of a student. A heretofore taboo subject, teachers have much to share about their creative, improvisational praxes when shared cultural scripts in urban classrooms are unavailable. This moving and poignant text illuminates as much as it inspires.

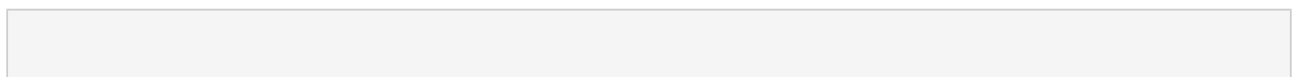
—**Angela Valenzuela**, Professor of Education, University of Texas, Director of the Texas Center for Education Policy

"Written by the most important kind of expert, someone who has been there, Dr. Ayers candidly discusses his own struggles following the violent death of one of his students. This book serves as an invaluable guide, providing research and practical tools on how to respond to a student death and facilitate a safe space in the classroom where students can ask questions, express emotions, and process their grief. This is a must-read for every teacher, administrator, and counselor so that a school is well prepared in the event of a tragedy."

—**Heidi Horsley**, executive director, Open to Hope Foundation, adjunct professor, Columbia University School of Social Work

"For those who teach, this book will likely evoke painful memories of loss and unrealized potential that accompanies the tragedy of any student's death. Classrooms and communities are worlds of their own, where saving one life or inspiring someone in even the most minute or momentary way can mean saving a whole world. Ayers's book honors the lives of both teachers and students. It is a book for all of us."

—**Jack Weinstein**, director, San Francisco Bay Area, Facing History and Ourselves



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