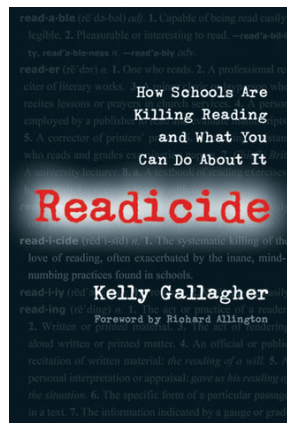




## Book Reviews



### Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It

By Kelly Gallagher. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers. Copyright 2009. 150 pages. ISBN: 978-1-57110.

Reviewed by Melinda Miller, Department of Language, Literacy and Special

Populations, Sam Houston State University

Three Reading/Language Arts teachers, who were enrolled in a master's in reading program sat discussing their public school classes before one of their graduate classes began one Thursday evening. Jan complained that she knew her students would be more excited about reading if they didn't have to do so much test-preparation. Jodi excitedly told the group about how she had been teaching her 7<sup>th</sup> graders to do annotations and highlighting, and place sticky-notes throughout their texts to help them comprehend what they were reading. "They are starting to comprehend better," she said with a sigh, "but sometimes I think they just want to read..." Pam shook her head and stated, "By the time they are in high school, kids either love reading, or they are turned off completely. I wish I knew how to turn those kids around and make them love to read as much as I do!" Jennifer came bursting through the door, holding a book in both hands and making it dance. "You have all just *got* to read this book!" she spoke with excitement. "This is what we were all looking for! This is a must-read for every reading teacher!"

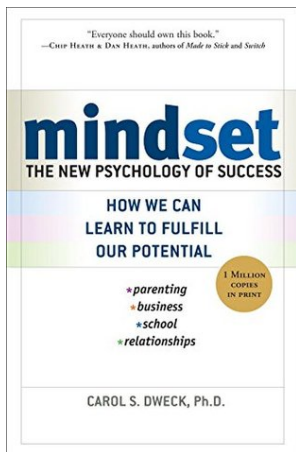
The book she was talking about was *Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and*

*What You Can Do About It* by Kelly Gallagher. Gallagher gives many reasons behind the reading problems that exist in schools today, and he offers concrete solutions that teachers can immediately put into play. Right at the start, Gallagher addresses what he calls "the elephant in the room." He states that "readicide," which he defines as "the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" can be caused by "a curriculum steeped in multiple-choice test preparation" which "drives shallow teaching and learning." He further states that "rather than lift up struggling readers, an emphasis on multiple choice test preparation ensures that struggling readers will continue to struggle."

Gallagher identifies several important things that students are not getting in the test-driven environment of today's schools. Using the analogy of a competitive swimmer, he talks about the many hours the swimmer spends in the pool before being involved in a competition. Similarly, a reader must spend many hours with quality literature in order to become a proficient reader. Although students need instruction in strategies and other aspects of reading, Gallagher warns against over teaching. Students need uninterrupted time spent enjoying a book, with just the right amount of teaching—not so much as to kill the joy of reading, but not so little that the student feels lost and overwhelmed. He calls this just right amount of teaching the "sweet spot."

Gallagher stresses the importance of providing a wide variety of interesting, authentic literature from which students can choose. He gives a list of 100 books his reluctant readers have loved to

read. In recent years, test practice type reading has overshadowed the reading of novels and other authentic text, and many high school seniors have graduated as good test takers, but not as avid readers. Gallagher implores teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators to recognize how our current practices are harming students and take a stand to do what is right for our students. As he puts it, “We need to find this courage. Today. Nothing less than a generation of readers hangs in the balance.” If this book finds its way into the hands of all teachers in all of our schools, readicide can become a thing of the past.



Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset, the new psychology of success*, New York, NY: Ballantine Books

Reviewed by: Elizabeth Lasley, Language, Literacy and Special Populations, Sam Houston State University

Do you see yourself as a lifelong learner always changing or innately programed

and there isn't anything that you can do about it? Dweck (2006), after years of research, describe in *Mindset, the new psychology of success* two types of mindsets concerning beliefs about human attributes, abilities and talents – fixed or growth mindsets. The book is full of anecdotes and stories from Dweck's own life as well as others. It offers illustrations of concepts that can make a difference in how we approach our work as service professionals. The development of either mindset is established around the following themes:

- How attitudes toward abilities and talents correlate with approaches to challenges and learning.
- Individuals stance on their own way of learning and success
- Effect of praise on self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and feelings of accomplishment
- How growth mindset's effect grades and productivity

Dweck indicates that an individual's beliefs either limits his or her potential or empowers success. Beliefs are domain specific and identifies the difference between a perception of mediocrity and exceptionality. For example, girls may believe they are poor math students but excellent in language arts because of comments from teachers, boys or parents. They justify their lack of success when taking tests to their lack the innate abilities in that specific domain. Such beliefs influence individuals' self-awareness, self-esteem, creativity, resilience, depression and even the tendency to stereotype others.

An example of how fixed and growth mindset begins at a very early age is described in the research, conducted by Dweck and colleagues, with four-year-olds and their perception of effort and risk. Children were provided with a choice to either redo easy jigsaw puzzles or try harder more challenging ones. Children with fixed mindsets played it safe choosing the easier puzzles that would affirm their existing ability. The children conveyed to the researchers their belief that smart kids don't make mistakes. Therefore, they wanted to make sure they succeeded in order to appear smart. The conclusion was that children with fixed mindsets view risk and effort as future possibilities for failure. Children with a growth mindset thought it strange that anyone would want to do the same puzzle over and over if they aren't learning

something new. The growth mindset children challenged themselves and success was viewed as becoming smarter.

“People in a growth mindset don’t just seek challenge, they thrive on it” (p. 21). In other words, people with a fixed mindset fear failure and those with a growth mindset flourish because they are taking risks. People with a fixed mindset lack confidence and are easily undermined by setbacks or expectations of effort. Having a growth mindset doesn’t mean working hard all the time but developing whatever skills necessary to improve i.e. time and effort for meeting challenges. A growth mindset embraces criticism and is viewed as valuable feedback. Maintaining a growth mindset is found to correlate with higher academic and career achievement levels over time.

Dweck’s work indicates that people with a fixed mindset assume that his or her character, intelligence, and creative ability are permanent and can’t be changed in any significant way. Success is based on innate inherent intelligence and measured against a fixed standard. An individual strives for success but avoids failure at all costs in order to maintain his or her belief of being smart or skilled. Whereas, a person with a growth mindset views failures as learning opportunities and chances to see what they need to work on.

Teachers and parents may have a fixed mindset regarding capabilities when underachievers performs poorly on assessments rather than encouraging students’ growth mindset. “An assessment at one point in time has little value for understanding someone’s ability, let alone their potential to succeed in future” (p. 29). Teachers and parents can help underachievers become achievers by facilitating and modeling

how to approach things from a growth mindset perspective.

Encouraging students through praise supports students’ fixed rather than growth mindset. “Telling children they’re smart, in the end, made them feel dumber and act dumber, but claim they were smarter. I don’t think this is what we’re aiming for when we put positive labels—“gifted,” “talented,” “brilliant”—on people.” (p. 75). Praising by labeling children fosters the development of fixed mindsets – self-fulfilling prophesy. The label communicates a description of innate and permanent qualities assumed by children and ignores intrinsic motivation connected to a growth mindset.

Therefore, Dweck’s work demonstrates that it is better to avoid labeling children as gifted or not gifted. If children truly believe they can improve at something they are driven to learn and practice – growth mindset. “Most often people believe that the ‘gift’ is the ability itself. Yet what feeds it is that constant, endless curiosity and challenge seeking.” (p. 63). The characteristic of a growth mindset is the drive to stick with it, even when things are far from going well.

The overall point of Dweck’s work is that mindsets are learned, and can be unlearned. Teachers and others influence their students’ achievement, self-confidence, and sense of well-being. The best way to do this is to model and encourage a growth mindset. A fixed mindset characterizes an internal monologue of constant judging and evaluation of every piece of evidence to decide one is a good person or better than another person. A growth mindset, on the other hand, is an internal monologue of passion for learning without judgement. A love of learning is a quality demonstrated by highly successful people.