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Gallager, K., & Allington, R.L. (2009*). Readicide: How Schools are killing reading and*

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“**You do not need to read study after study to sense the degree of readicide in schools today. Instead, talk to any kindergarten teacher. Ask her about students’ attitudes in her classroom during reading time, and it is likely she will tell you about her students’ enthusiasm. Then, ask a fifth-grade teacher the same question and you’ll likely receive a mixed response. Finish your field research by again asking a twelfth-grade teacher the same question, and not his quick exasperation. This unfortunate shifting of reading attitudes-from enthusiasm to indifference to hostility-is a pattern I have witnessed first hand during numerous visits to schools across this country**.” (3)

“High interest reading is being squeezed out in favor of more test preparation practice. Interesting books are disappearing as funding is diverted to purchase “magic pill” reading programs. **Sustained silent reading time is being abandoned because it is often seen as “soft” or “nonacademic.” For many students, academic reading, thought incredibly important, has become their only reading**.” (4)

“I am not against teaching student how to take a test. Indeed, we all want all of our students to have test-taking knowledge. However, the overemphasis of teaching reading through the lens of preparing students for state-mandated reading tests has become so completely unbalanced that it is drowning any chance our adolescents have of developing into lifelong readers. We are developing test-takers at the expense of readers.” (7)

Authentic interest is generated when students are given the opportunity to delve deeply into an interesting idea.” (10)

“There is a big difference between memorizing facts and understanding history, between teachers simply being information dispensers versus teachers turning student into deep thinkers.” (10)

“**In an analysis of the standards found in a typical K-12 school system, Robert J. Marzano found that ‘the knowledge and skills these documents describe represent about 3,500 benchmarks. To cover all of this content, you would have to change schooling from K-12 to K to 22**”. Marzano’s findings raise a central point: when teachers try to cram twenty-two years of curriculum in to a K-12 time frame, everyone loses. The teachers were forced to adopt a shallow approach, sprinting through material. Students develop into memorizers instead of into thinkers. And both teachers’ and students’ motivations are irreparably harmed.” (11)

“Teachers often complain about ‘teaching to the test,’ but teaching to the test is a good thing if the test is a good test.” (12) ‘The problem occurs when we spend most of our time teaching to a shallow test.” (12)

“Because our students are so busy covering a vast curriculum that little, if any, deeper thinking is occurring.” (14)

“By gearing students year in and year out to practice for state-mandated reading exams, we had begun producing high school seniors who had passed their reading tests but were leaving our schools without the cultural literacy needed to be productive citizens in a democratic society.” (28-29)

“Students who do not read well fall into two categories:

1. Those who come from test preparation factories that impressively raise reading scores, thus sacrificing any chance of developing their students into lifelong readers or into deeper thinkers on the way; or
2. Those who still read poorly and for the most part have long since given up. (17)

“We must start all discussions about the state of reading on our campuses with a simple, direct question: **Do our student have ample access to high-interest reading material**?” (32)

“**In a famous study of fifth graders, Anders, Wilson, and Fielding (1998) found a strong correlation between time spent reading and performance on standardized reading tests**.” (35)

“I have begun to notice a troubling trend with many of my adolescent readers over the past few years. Most of these students can ‘read,’ but when it comes time to think deeply about what they have read, they have difficulty diving below the surface. They can find information on a moment’s notice on the Internet, but hey have trouble getting past a surface-level understanding of the text they retrieve. In short, they know a lot, but they understand little.” (39)

Healy laments that in today’s schools, student ‘are not allowed to sit and think. They are constantly rammed through a curriculum to see how fast we can move them along.” (39-40)

Consider the following:

* Less than one-third of thirteen-year-olds are daily readers, a 14 percent decline from twenty years earlier.
* Among seventeen-year-olds, the percentage of nonreaders has more than doubled over a twenty-year period, from 9 percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004.
* On average, Americans ages fifteen to twenty-four spend almost two hours a day watching television, and only seven minutes of their leisure time on reading.
* Nearly half of all Americans ages fifteen to twenty-four do not read books for pleasure. (41)

“More recently, in *To Read or Not to Read*, a study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), researchers reached the same conclusion. **Students who read the most for fun scored the highest on standardized reading tests**.” (35)

“**If our students are to have any chance of discovering reading flow, if they are to have any chance to discover what it is like to come up for air while reading, if they are to have any chance of becoming lifelong readers, they will need what all readers need when they read: access to great books and large doses of uninterrupted time to read them**.” (73)

(p. 112) “**Is it hyperbole to say that we are killing a generation of readers? Consider some of the findings found in To Read or Not to Read (National Public Radio 2007**):

* The first generation of students raised in the midst of electronic media read less-and less-well than previous generations of students
* Students who read less, read less well. Students who read less well, do less well in school. People who do less well in school doe less well in the workplace and participate less in civic life.
* Internet reading produces shallower reading than book reading. When reading the Internet materials, there is more emphasis on reading headlines and blurbs. Deeper reading is less likely to occur.
* The reading proficiency of college graduates fell 23 percent in the past ten years.
* Less than one out of three college graduates reads at a ‘proficiency’ level—what used to be considered proficient high school level of reading.
* One of three high school students in the United States drops out.
* Fifty-five percent of people who read at “below basic” level are unemployed.
* Half of the adults in this country do not read it either to themselves or to their children.

**SUSTAINED SILENT READING (SSR)**

**& FREE VOLUNTARY READING (FVR) BENEFITS**

**SSR is actually a valuable investment in test preparation**. In *The* *Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*, Stephen Krashen (1993) notes:

* **In 38 of 41 studies, students given free voluntary reading (FVR) time did as well or better in reading comprehension tests than students give the traditional skill-based reading instruction.**
* **The longer FVR is practiced, the more consistent the results.**
* **Reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed. Kids who do the most recreational reading become the best readers.**

Yi-Chen Wu and S. Jay Samuels (2004), researchers at the University of Minnesota, who conducted a study of their own. Their findings flew in the face of the National Reading Panel:

* More time spent reading had significant effect on achievement compared to a control condition where less time was allotted for recreational reading.
* Poor readers showed significantly rater gain in word recognition and vocabulary than good readers.
* Poor readers tended to have greater gains in vocabulary with 15 minutes of reading” and “they had better gains on reading comprehension with 40 minutes of reading.” (42)

**SSR is necessary to allow students an opportunity to build their prior knowledge and background**. (43)

When it comes to vocabulary acquisition, SSR provides the best investment of reading time. As Krashen notes:

* **Each time an unfamiliar word is seen in print, a small increase in word knowledge typically occurs.**
* **Students who read a novel with many unique words actually learned the meaning of those words from context clues only.**
* **FVR results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling and grammatical development**. (43)

“A 2007 global study found that fourth-grade students in the United States, despite the emphasis on reading under No Child Left Behind, have actually lost ground in reading ability compared with students from around the world.” (43)

“**SSR provides many students with their only opportunity to develop a recreational reading habit**.” (44)

“**To become a lifelong reader, one has to do a lot of varied and interesting reading. If students don’t read much at home, school becomes the only place where ‘lighter’ reading can take hold. When schools deprive students of the pleasures of recreational reading, we end up graduation test-takers who may never again read for pleasure**.” (45)

“Making sure every student has a book to take home to read is the single most important issue in our quest to develop young readers.” (46)

“When I realized that in two different class periods I did not have a single ninth-grade student who could identify the vice president of the United States, I grasped how serious the lack of my students’ reading depth had become. Yes, they can recognize foreshadowing in *Lord of the Flies*, but they have little understanding of what is going on in the world outside of their high school.” (47)

“One way I addressed this problem in my classroom was by adding a weekly reading task I call ‘The Article of the Week.’ These are real-world writings taken from straight news stories, essays, editorials, blogs, and speeches.” (47) The article of the week (AoW) is distributed every Monday and collected every Friday.” (48)

A study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress(NAEP) came to a similar conclusion**. It found, ‘that students who read for fun almost every day outside of school scored higher on the NAEP assessment of reading achievement than children who read for fun only once or twice a week, who in turn outscored children who read for fun outside of school only once or twice a month, who in turn, outscored children who hardly ever or never read for fun outside of school.**” (52)

“**Numerous studies have found the most powerful motivator that schools can offer to build lifelong readers is to provide students with time in the school day for free and voluntary reading (FVR). Pilgreen and Krashen (1993) found that FVR is a strong indicator for the amount of reading students will do outside of school, and Greaney and Clarke (1975) found the effect *appears to last years after the SSR program ends*.**” (75) (FVR = Free Voluntary Reading)

In most cases of SSR failure, one or more of the following were contributing factors:

* Students were places in SSR without interesting books to read. Telling a student that reading is worthwhile activity is one thing, having numerous interesting books for the student to choose from is another.
* Students were required (or allowed) to do academic reading or homework during SSR.
* Teachers did not understand the value of SSR. Often they were using this time to grade essays, catch up on paperwork, or answer emails. (45)

“McGill-Franzen and Allington (2004) also note that summer vacations, on average, create an annual reading achievement gap of about three months between students from middle-and lower-class families…In other words, the reading achievement of children from low-income families declined between June and September while the achievement of more economically advantage d children remain stable or inched upward.” The result? By the end of sixth grade, the summer reading loss alone creates a reading gap of eighteen months.” (55)

“One research study suggests that summer reading loss can be prevented if students read four to five books over the summer (Kim 2004).” (55)

“**I have adopted a 50/50 approach in my classroom. To mix up the reading diet of my students, I want half of their reading to be academic, and I want half of their reading to be recreational.**” (82)

**\*\*\*Imaginative Rehearsals\*\*\***

“In my first book, *Reading Reasons* (Gallagher 2003), I discuss the work about philosopher **Kenneth Burke, who says the reason young people should read books is that it provides them with ‘imaginative rehearsals’ for the real world**.” (66)

“**When students read books solely through the lens of test preparation, they miss out on the opportunity to read books through the lens of life preparation. As a result, the imaginative rehearsals are lost, and when that happens, readicide sets in**.” (72)

“**Philosopher Kenneth Burke’s (1968) notion that the real value in reading literature is that it provides our students with imaginative rehearsals for the real world. It is imperative that we augment every novel our students read with real-world text that shows them that the book they are reading offers valuable insight into living productive lives**.” (79)

“**We would never buy a book at Barnes and Noble if it came with mandated chapter-by-chapter exams. We would never read a book so that we could tackle worksheets afterward. We would never begin a new read with the expressed goal of earning points. And we would never feel compelled to read if we had to complete a project after every book. Yet, as teachers, we do all of these things to developing readers. We subject them repeatedly to treatments that are counterproductive to developing book lovers**.” (73)

“**I am well aware that as an adult I do not need any accountability when I sit down to read a book. Because I find reading enjoyable, no one needs to dangle a quiz over my head to entice me to read. What I have found, however, especially with reluctant readers, is that accountability is needed—not too much to get in the way of a pleasurable reading experience but enough to prompt reading to occur**. I achieve this delicate balance in my classroom by assigning one-pagers. To receive an A,B, or C grade in my classroom, each student must read one self-selected recreational book per month. Upon completing each book, students are asked to fill out a one-pager, a process that takes no more than twenty minutes. One-pagers are simply one-page reflections of the books they have just read.” (82)

“When motivating adolescents to read, I am constantly searching for the sweet spot of instruction. Teaching matters, but what kind of teaching matters most? Where is the reading **sweet spot**? It certainly is not found buried in a 122-page curriculum guide. However, it is also not found when we hand students books that are too difficult for them and ask them to navigate on their own. **The sweet spot lies somewhere between these two extreme instructional approaches.**” (90)

“**When every student in the country reads *Romeo and Juliet*, it means we all acquire a shared cultural literacy, a sharing that is foundational if we, as a culture, are going to be able to communicate with one another**.” (92-93)

As much as I understand how “doing English” has ruined books for students, all students should be engaged in books they might normally avoid. (92)

“**The question isn’t whether classics should be taught; the question is how do we get student reading classics to reach the sweet spot?**” (92)

“Because a teacher kills a great book by mishandling it doesn’t mean the book is stupid and pointless. It means the reader was not put in a position to discover the book’s greatness.” (93)

“**I never focus on whether my students will like the books. Sure I’d like my students to enjoy the books as much as I do, but it is important that they take away something valuable after they wrestle with them**.” (93)

“**I am a wiser, more culturally literate human being because I was required to read difficult ‘texts’ in my life**.” (93)