

Literacy



If you have been in education for a number of years, you are probably familiar with the term “whole language,” popularized by Kenneth S. Goodman in the 1970s. Whole language instruction emphasized the immersion of students in books, with less emphasis on traditional practices of teaching phonics and spelling. The underpinning idea was that learning should be student-centered rather than teacher directed; readers were equipped to engage in print and make meaning out of what they read. Phonics was not totally dismissed, but was taught more incidentally when students encountered certain sound-letter patterns in print. Comprehension took priority.

The ensuing “reading wars” pitted whole language and its successor, “balanced literacy,” against more traditional approaches, with the pendulum swinging back and forth for many years. However, a number of Goodman’s ideas live on, including the importance of children’s literature, immersing readers in books, and creating print-rich environments for students (Sawchuk, 2020).

Goodman's approach, though, was more of a philosophy than a program. One widely used program developed by Lucy Calkins, Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University, is Units of Study in Reading. She spent decades applying some principles of whole language and balanced literacy to the creation of the units. A workshop approach was utilized in the units, focusing on comprehension with less emphasis on word study.

Recently, a summary of fifty years of literacy research has concluded that skilled readers rely more heavily on knowledge of letter-sound correspondences than context clues when learning new words. For many students, the alphabetic code must be systematically and explicitly taught, not incidentally discovered. Thus, comprehension and word identification should be complimentary goals in literacy programs.

Based on this evidence, Lucy Calkins has revised her stance on teaching reading and consequently revised the Units of Study in Reading to incorporate daily structured phonics lessons (Calkins, 2022).

The website, <https://www.unitsofstudy.com/k-2reading/>, states, “The new primary Units of Study in Reading offer teachers concrete ways to bring the best of science of reading research—including explicit teaching of ‘slider power,’ engaging decodable texts, and an emphasis on knowledge generation—into vibrant workshop classrooms.” “Slider power” is defined as running your fingers under letters and sounding them out.

Bringing this history closer to home, the research on reading instruction was taken into consideration with the development of Pathways 2.0 (Kendall Hunt, 2019) which promotes a balanced approach to literacy instruction, dividing instruction into three blocks of time:



Instructional Blocks

Word Study

Vocabulary
Phonological
Awareness/
Phonics/ Spelling
– Grade 1
Word Work/ Spelling
– Grades 2-8

Reading Workshop

Whole Group

- *Speaking & Listening*
- *Mini-lessons*

Small Group

- *Guided Reading*

Independent

Writing Workshop

Writing and Handwriting
(school-wide selected handwriting program)

Grammar

References

Calkins, L. (November 23, 2022). Lucy Calkins revisits and revises her reading curriculum: The important truth about how to teach reading. *Education Week*, 42 (14), p. 24.

Pathways 2.0. (2019). *Pathways 2.0 teacher manual*. Dubuque, IO: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Sawchuk, S. (2020). Kenneth S. Goodman, 'founding father' of whole language, dead at 92, EducationWeek, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/kenneth-s-goodman-founding-father-of-whole-language-dead-at-92/2020/05>.