Andrea Mooney

Whole Language Timeline

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| **Year** | **Event** | **Significance** |
| Pre- 1930s | Phonics by Mechanistic Approach | Teachers taught students to sound out words by learning rigid rules and procedures. (Walker, 2008) |
| 1935-1939 | Backlash to Phonics | “Scholars, publishers, and teachers banned phonics instruction” (Walker, 2008, p. 34). |
| 1940s-1950s | Shift from Phonics to Whole Words | Phonics viewed as “outdated and intrinsically wrong” (Walker, 2008, p. 34). Whole words became the predominant approach to teaching new words: Teachers provided an oral context and instructed students to look at the printed word on the chalkboard. Phonics used as a “last resort” (Walker, 2008, p. 34). |
| 1950s | Word Perception  Intrinsic Phonics Instruction | Gates (1951) argued that children should read naturally, immediately perceiving words in the same way that adults do.  Teachers used intrinsic phonics instruction to teach phonics in the context of meaningful reading. (Walker, 2008) |
| 1955 | Flesch (1955) Published *Why Johnny Can’t Read* | Amidst growing concern that children were not receiving proper strategies for sounding out unfamiliar words, Flesch (1955) published this book. He contended that children hesitated when encountering unfamiliar words and argued that children should learn to sound out words. (Walker, 2008) |
| 1960s | Resurgence of Phonics | Many basal readers included programs for analytic phonics instruction, which uses sight words to teach letter-sound relationships. (Walker, 2008) |
| 1967 | The First Grade Studies | The federal government commissioned these studies to analyze what method for word learning was most effective. The studies analyzed code-emphasis approaches (i.e., intense phonics) and meaning-emphasis approaches (i.e., whole word). The directors of the project, Bond and Dykstra (1967), concluded that no single approach was better in all circumstances or should be used to the exclusion of others. (Walker, 2008) |
| 1967 | Chall (1967) Published *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* | Analyzing available studies, Chall argued that a code-emphasis approach (i.e., intense phonics) was more effective for word learning than a meaning-emphasis approach (i.e., whole word). (Walker, 2008) |
| 1979 | The Principles of Whole Language Emerged: Goodman and Goodman (1979) “Learning to read is natural” | The authors established the founding principles of the whole language movement, asserting that (1) through immersion in print-rich environments, children can learn to read as they learn to speak, and that (2) children best learn to read and write when doing so for authentic purposes. |
| 1980s | Rise of Whole Language | The whole language approach gained momentum. (Baumann & Hoffman, 1998) The debate “nomenclature” shifted from a “phonics versus look-say conflict to a phonics versus whole language debate.” (Baumann, 1998)  The whole language movement was in “full swing” throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Walker, 2008, p. 42). |
| 1985 | *Becoming a Nation of Readers* | Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) prepared this government report. They recommended phonics instruction as a strategic process of using familiar word patterns to figure out unfamiliar words. At the same time, they advocated that children be provided opportunities to read instead of experience solely workbook exercises. (Walker, 2008). |
| Mid 1980s | Reading Recovery becomes Popular in the US | The early intervention program was developed by Clay (1979) in New Zealand but did not make its way into US classrooms until the mid 1980s. Many US reading specialists turned to Reading Recovery, contending that a “stronger support system, especially for word learning, was needed for poor readers than what was provided by whole-language instructional principles” (McCormick & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 178). |
| 1989 | Stahl and Miller’s (1989) Research Study | Stahl and Miller (1989) published their research study “Whole language and language experience approaches for beginning reading: A quantitative research synthesis.” The authors promoted the whole language approach. |
| 1990 | Adams (1990) Published *Beginning to Read* | Adams (1990) argued for reading instruction using the alphabetic principle (sound-symbol relationships) and phonemic awareness (sound segmentation and sound synthesis). (Walker, 2008) |
| 1990s | Renewed Support for Phonics | “The 1990s ended with a growing consensus that phonics in some way needs to be included in reading instruction. There was renewed support for multiple approaches to teach phonics” (Walker, 2008, p. 47). |
| 2001 | Reading First | The Reading First component of No Child Left Behind offered grants for schools to purchase reading programs considered scientifically-based. Since only programs claiming a scientific base defined by experimental studies qualified, money was channeled into explicit phonics instructional programs, “often to the exclusion of reading literature and reading information” (Walker, 2008, p. 47). In essence, the pendulum swayed decidedly away from whole language. |

References

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