INNOVATIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

HONORS THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for graduation from

THE HONORS PROGRAM

by

SARAH A. HUSKINS

ADVISOR - DR. MILDRED BALLOU

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

NOVEMBER, 1968

Nov 16, 1968

M. Ballou

The Library
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
CONTENTS

Introduction.................................................. 1
Innovations in Pre-School Education.................. 2
Innovations in Reading................................. 15
Bibliography.............................................. 34
Appendix.................................................. 37
President Lyndon Johnson, in his Education Message to the ninety-ninth Congress, said that, in addition to Franklin Roosevelt's four freedoms, there is a fifth, the freedom of ignorance. That is that man everywhere should be free to develop his talents to their full potential, unhampered by arbitrary barriers of race, birth, or income. Early childhood education is the basis of all other education that attempts to fulfill this freedom.

It has some goals of its own. To achieve the intellectual goals, teachers use a variety of materials to develop the young child's curiosity and language and to extend his experiences. The emotional goals are security and confidence for the child. The concern for and responsibility toward others are the social goals. Good health habits are the goals of his health training.¹

Innovations in two areas of early childhood education, preschool education and the teaching of reading, affect the fulfillment of all of these goals. Teachers should be well-informed in these areas. In this paper, the chapter on preschool education deals with Project Head Start and its effects on early childhood education. The second chapter, dealing with the teaching of reading, studies the talking typewriter, Words-in-Color, the initial teaching alphabet, and the Denver experiment concerning reading in kindergarten.

¹McQueen, pp. 28-29.
INNOVATIONS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The rising rate of school failures and drop-outs seems to be linked with poverty. Children from poverty-stricken homes seem to be behind their peers in academic achievement from the very beginning of their school career. In a typical case, a boy might quit school because he is so discouraged with his failing marks or because he is forced to quit to get a job to help support his family. If he is able to find a job at all, it will be a menial one with low pay. Thus, he settles down to rear more children in more poverty-stricken homes to be more school failures and drop-outs.

Educators, along with other professional groups, have been looking for a way to break this vicious circle. The pre-school years seem to be the best time to improve a child's prospects of later school achievement, because they are the years when a child achieves most of his growth in the areas of mental, physical, social, and emotional development. He achieves this growth and development best through a wide variety of concrete, first-hand experiences that come directly from his culture.

For instance, a child in the average middle-class home is exposed to books that will take him on many interesting journeys. The mere fact that someone will take the time to read to him helps this child to develop a desire to read and to learn. Now consider the physical and emotional living conditions of the child from the slums. He may never have been outside of his own block where he could have
such experiences as visiting a doctor, playing in a park, taking a trip to the zoo, and riding in a car or bus. Besides going to bed hungry, he may have to share it with two or more siblings. The disease-infested dwelling he calls home often lacks the consideration, love, encouragement, understanding, and warmth that children from middle-class homes take for granted. Should teachers expect such a child to reach the same level of achievement as his middle-class peer? Because he lacks such experiences, this child is often called "culturally deprived."

This is a misnomer. No one is deprived of a culture. Culture is the sum total of all that surrounds a person and it affects him in one way or another. A better term for this child, if he is to be singled out, would be "culturally disadvantaged" or "educationally disadvantaged."

You may think that this sketchy example is exaggerated. However, it is all too common, especially in the larger cities. Within the last four years, the government, through the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Office of Education, has been working with educators to set up a pre-school program for these educationally disadvantaged children. It is called Project Head Start.

Head Start is aimed at youngsters four or five years of age from the slum areas. Some classes run all day, while those in other areas may be for only half of the day. Classes may meet almost anywhere in the community, but most commonly they meet in the schools or churches. The aim, of course, is to provide the child with the experiences of the middle-class child so that he will be able to start school on an even level.

The programs are quite varied, but there are four main features
in this comprehensive project. One of the most important features is the wide variety of free professional services made available to the child. These range from dental check-ups to trained therapists in the severe cases. Along with these services there is usually some type of nutrition program that will provide one well-balanced meal and/or snack while the child is at school. Another important feature of the program is that directors strive to keep classes small. An average Head Start class might have a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:15 while that of the regular kindergarten or first grade may be as great as 1:25. The ratio for a Head Start class may even be as low as 1:6 with the use of non-professionals as teacher aides. It is readily understandable that these small classes enable the teacher to give the educationally disadvantaged child the individual attention that he so desperately needs. With the growing use of non-professionals in this program, parent participation has become another feature of the Head Start program. Parents work with the administrators in planning and executing the programs and may eventually work with the teachers in the classroom. This type of planning can bring about valuable good will and could educate the parent as well as the child. This type of planning leads to another feature of the program, administrative flexibility. The program would meet with little success if it could not adjust to the needs of the community.¹ In one area, due to a shortage of trained therapists for children, a program was set up with a classroom situation on the pattern of an ideal family. Male and female teachers who displayed a good relationship and the

¹ Brademas, p.22.
ability to communicate were present in the classroom, along with
teen-age volunteers who give the children the attention of loving older
siblings. With the warmth, friendliness, and love of a home life pre-
vailing, only one out of five was still considered seriously disturbed
at the end of the program. The children in this type of environment
were able to increase their vocabulary, to develop their social skills,
and to form the concepts necessary to succeed in the regular kindergar-
ten.\textsuperscript{2} Using this administrative flexibility in such a way encourages
maximum parent and community involvement which could bring about
changes in the social and educational institutions of the community.

The National Education Association recently published a poll
it made of public school systems with an enrollment of 300 or more.
Out of 3,278 school systems reporting some type of Head Start program,
62.9\% of them operated the entire program while 37.1\% only participated
in the program by providing either teachers or services. The poll
found that schools provide a wide variety of special services. Of the
62.9\% that operate a program, 93.6\% give health examinations, 93.4\%
have a nutrition program, 85\% have home consultation service, 61.3\%
have psychological testing, 36.4\% test mental ability, and 23.2\% test
the aptitude of the children. As mentioned before, parental partici-
pation can be an important aspect of the program. Nearly 89\% have some
type of orientation session for parents of beginning Head Start children.
Using parents as teacher aides and having parent-teacher conferences are

\textsuperscript{2}Kedd, pp. 170-174.
policies of 83% of those schools operating Head Start programs. Another interesting aspect of the program taken from the poll deals with finances. The program costs from 349 dollars to 1,875 dollars per pupil. The funds were received mainly from federal and local sources.  

In assessing the Head Start program and what it has done, challengers charge that the program has been mismanaged and that the teachers were not adequately trained to deal with the young disadvantaged child. Most of them agree that something must be done to break the cycle of poverty and that the purpose and goal of Head Start are steps in the right direction. In-service workshops for Head Start teachers and the use of not only federal funds but also the resources available from the federal government and from the school lunch program are attempts to solve the problems brought up by the critics. Suggestions that some critics have made to replace Head Start will be discussed later in this paper.

Another criticism of the program is that it is segregated. In a program in Chicago Heights, Illinois, 97% of the students were Negroes. This resulted from the fact that the Negroes, the Mexican-Americans or whatever minority group was involved were forced to live in one area or a ghetto. The Office of Economic Opportunity insisted that the 1967 summer program be integrated, both the students and staff. The staff worked well together and found that the children were not consciously aware of racial differences, possibly because they were able to work and play together with each other before the idea of race could be planted in them. In some cases the pupil's acceptance won over the 

---

Praising the Head Start program, Representative John Brademas of Indiana cites four main achievements in the Head Start program. Although it was not an anticipated outcome, Head Start has created a demand for more pre-school education in the public schools for all children, not just the educationally disadvantaged. Many educators are now clamoring for tax-supported kindergartens. In another area, the medical and dental health of children in these programs have been vastly improved. The elevation of a child's self-respect and the development of a positive attitude toward learning represent important goals that Rep. Brademas claims have been reached. In some cases a child's measured intellectual ability has been increased.

"The trouble with Head Start is that it stops," claims the representative. After the child has been introduced to the rich experiences, individual attention, and other benefits of Head Start, can he then adjust to and succeed in the regular kindergarten or first grade, where he must compete again with his more fortunate peers? This is the question educators are asking after noticing some children slipping back into the old rut of poverty. Another program has been started to counteract the loss of gains made in the Head Start Program. It has been given the very appropriate name of Project Follow Through.

"Project Follow Through is a joint effort by the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Office of Education. Its aim is to extend

---

4 Whitman, pp 52-53.
5 Brademas, p. 34.
6 Ibid.
the pre-school Head Start program of comprehensive, interdisciplinary education into the public schools. This program, started in the 1967-68 school year, is the first federally funded program to provide for school reform in the individual elementary school. A continuous program of individualized instruction and comprehensive service to all children in school is needed. This would lead to automatic non-grading the author of the above statement claims.

The approach used in teaching these children would be much the same as that used in the Head Start program. That is emphasizing individual and small group instruction and utilizing sensory perceptions. The objectives of such an approach would be to increase the active involvement of families, to implement a comprehensive health and nutrition program that might possibly serve both breakfast and lunch to the children, to provide adequate auxiliary services such as guidance counselors and speech therapists, to use the team approach in working with the child and his family, and to compare an experimental group of children in this program with a control group and evaluate the results.

At the time material was gathered for this paper, a report on such an evaluation was not available. However, the anticipated results may be reviewed. The overall goal was to develop the maximum potential in each child. To reach this goal the program must increase the child's positive image, improve his verbal ability, expand his cultural environment, promote and develop good physical and mental health, and attain a

---

7 Berson, p. 459.
9 Braford, pp. 22-23.
greater understanding of his environment.  

The future for Project Head Start and Project Follow Through seems to be somewhat shaky. Both are facing a tremendous cutback on federal funds for the 1968-69 school year. Those working for Project Follow Through will have only about 13 million dollars out of the proposed 120 million while the appropriations for Project Head Start are some 15 million dollars less than last year's. Prospects for the 1969 school year do not look much better.  

Among those that criticize the Head Start program are the cognitive psychologists. To counteract and break the cycle of poverty they believe that teachers must provide deliberate stimulation of the child's intellect almost from birth. They feel that Project Head Start has not put enough emphasis on intellectual growth in order to change the child's ability to speak, to read, to write, or to think, and that there has been too much emphasis on the social and/or emotional development of the child. They suggest three alternatives to the Head Start program.  

The "pressure-cooker approach," developed by Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann, is a program that emphasizes drill. The children follow a schedule of three 20-minute classes separated by a juice break, drawing, singing, and outdoor activities. In these classes designed to stimulate the intellectual growth of children from the slums, the children shout out answers, say chants, and repeat whole sentences in unison. This seems reminiscent of the "blab schools" and contradictory to

---

10 Bradford, pp. 22-23.

11 Brademas, p. 29.

12 Pines, p. 43.
modern educational methods and theory. However, on an achievement test given to some four- and five-year-olds who completed these classes, the five-year-olds scored at the mid-second-grade level in reading and spelling. The four-year-olds scored at the first-grade level in these areas. These same tests given to the children later, such as at their entrance into regular kindergarten or first grade would probably give more valid results. This would show what the children have actually learned against what they have only memorized.

The Montessori method would be acceptable to the cognitive psychologists because it is designed to bring order and logic into the child's world. The method is based on the child's choice of toy. Each toy in the room has been designed by Dr. Marie Montessori of Italy to lead to a specific learning sequence. Dr. Montessori started her program as a day-care center for underprivileged children, but it has been used mainly by middle-class families in the United States.

The third alternative is the New Nursery School in Greeley, Colorado, which was developed by Glen Nimnicht, John Meier and Oralie McAfee. They designed a "responsive environment" using O. K. Moore's typewriter, which will be discussed later, and some methods from Marie Montessori. The teacher and his assistants encourage free play and free exploration. The initiative always comes from the child as he spends most of his time in self-directed activities. The child does something for his own sake instead of to obtain a reward. Supporters claim that this type of

---

13 Pines, p. 44.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
environment will improve the child's language ability. The objectives of this program, originally designed for the poor Spanish-Americans, are to help the child form positive images, to improve the use of his senses and perceptions, to enhance his understanding and use of language, and to develop conceptual problem-solving abilities. The ideals seem much the same as those of Head Start.

The major criticism of the cognitive psychologists is the use of the drill method. Any educational program should promote long-range goals rather than the short-range goals exemplified by the programs that those psychologists support. Skills are only one aspect of any child's education. "What he learns today should be related to continuing goals he will be striving to attain all his life." The child can learn to respond and still not know. He needs to learn to act independently.

Head Start has had quite an impact on early childhood education. It has been an impetus for the growing movement to begin the education of children at the age of three or four instead of five or six. This movement has been endorsed by the NEA and by President Johnson. Because of the emphasis on nursery school education, Head Start has been expanded to all year in some cities or child-care centers have been established for all children, not just for the educationally disadvantaged.

Nursery school education began on a vacant lot in a London slum at the turn of the century. Although the philosophy of nurturance was a revolutionary idea at this time, this school bathed, clothed, and

---

16 Nimnicht, p. 35.
17 Ibid, p. 34.
18 Brunner, p. 45.
fed the children as it educated them through the use of materials and learning devices. Nursery schools were introduced in the United States in the 1920's. They became only a service for those who could pay for it, so the philosophy of nurturance was dropped. Today, the idea has been picked up and used in the Head Start program for disadvantaged children.\textsuperscript{19}

It is important to remember that nursery school doesn't necessarily insure academic success, but it does develop academic readiness as well as human behavior and development. The benefits of nursery school from stimulating play equipment to practicing democratic procedures. It provides a chance for the child to develop friendships with youngsters of different races and cultural backgrounds. The atmosphere of nursery school encourages the child's creative curiosity, creative thinking, and his questioning attitudes. The child can learn to deal with conflicts, to cooperate, to respect others' rights, and to share responsibility. All of this takes place under the continuous, wise supervision of a trained nursery school teacher. As well as an adjustment period for the child, it helps the parents accept the fact that their child is going to school.\textsuperscript{20}

The Primary Education Project is another outgrowth of the Head Start program. With two main objectives in mind, classes are being operated for children aged three through five in Pittsburgh by the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the University of Pittsburgh, and the General Learning Corp. The development of more effective learning

\textsuperscript{19}Spodek, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{20}Taylor, pp. 24-26.
materials and teaching techniques is the immediate goal. The long-range goal is to then refine these materials and methods into a comprehensive curriculum for children aged three through nine. 21

Men are becoming more common in early childhood education as a result of Head Start. Men first became involved in Head Start as administrators and organizers and later as teachers. It has been suggested that male student teachers meet their first class in kindergarten and that elementary administrators serve a year as teachers in the nursery school, kindergarten, and primary grades. 22 In one area men have been assigned to work in cooperation with the regular women teachers in the first grade. He progresses with his class through the third grade and then returns to the first. The goals are to improve academic achievement and to develop a healthy attitude in the child toward himself, his peers, and school. In their homes many children may lack daily relationships with a male which are so important to their development. A male teacher helps to solve this problem, in addition to reducing the teacher-pupil ratio. 23

Parent involvement in Head Start had worked so well in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that administrators decided to try it in the kindergarten program on an informal teaching basis. Parents, at first, were skeptical and some were even opposed to such a program. Nevertheless, the program was instigated and all parent participation was linked to curriculum areas. The results were most rewarding. Teachers found that there was

22 Abbott, p. 45.
23 Daharsh, p. 48.
more carry-over from the classrooms to the homes, more individualized attention in class, and more insight into the children's problems. Parents found that they knew their children's classmates. All of these things helped to cement relationships between the teacher and child, the school and home, and the teacher and parent.²⁴

It is plain to see that some type of enrichment program for the educationally disadvantaged child is a necessity. Although some criticism of Project Head Start may be just, it has not been in operation long enough to see its long-range effects. The children from these programs have not yet completed high school or any form of higher education, found a job, or reared their own children. These aspects of their lives will determine if Head Start has done what it set out to do. It may well be the next generation that will reap the benefits of the program.

If Project Head Start is abandoned sometime in the future, it certainly has had its effect on regular public school education. However, be somewhat wary of starting a child's regular education at the age of three or four. It has already been determined that these are the most important years in his life. The child needs to be loved and nurtured. His own mother can do so much more for him at this time than any other person. However, if the mother is looking for a babysitting service, then a program such as Head Start or nursery school would be much better for the child than the environment in which his mother may leave him.

²⁴Inwood, p. 124.
INNOVATIONS IN READING

There are four kinds of readers. The first is like an hourglass; and their reading being as the sand, it runs out, and leaves not a vestige behind. A second is like the sponge which imbibes everything and returns it in nearly the same state, only a little dirtier. The third is like a jelly-bag, allowing all that is pure to pass away, and retaining only the refuse and dregs. And the fourth is like the slaves in the diamond mines of Golconda, who, casting aside all that is worthless, retain only pure gems.¹

Teachers strive to produce the latter type of reader. Any other type is all but doomed in his school career and handicapped throughout his life. There are many materials and procedures on the market designed to help teach reading. Before studying some of these, some authorities feel that the teaching of reading has already come a long way. Reading has been well-integrated into the entire curriculum, especially into the English curriculum. Reading, writing, grammar, and spelling have all become one subject, instead of several, under the title of language arts and this is as it should be. After all, reading in everyday life is not blocked off into thirty minutes in the morning and thirty minutes in the afternoon. Remedial and developmental reading has become a part of the high school program, not must the elementary program. To keep these two programs in operation, there have been changes in the materials and textbooks. Above all, there has been more and better research in the area of reading due to government grants.² Other

¹Smith, Mila E., p. 445.
innovative practices include the greater emphasis on writing, learning the letters, phonics and other decoding skills, the greater use of trade books and other non-text materials, and the greater use of technology.

Before studying any innovations in depth, there has been a wide variety of attempts to improve the teaching of reading in the elementary grades. They range from the far-out to those that could be put into use simply in any classroom. The one that seems the most improbable is a memory-enhancing pill called Cylert. Abbott Laboratories in North Chicago have been experimenting with this pill and claim to have improved the permanent learning in rats. A division of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation held a seminar of well-qualified scientists to discuss how drugs might be used to enhance the memory of human beings. They agreed that with the use of drugs they could alter the intellectual capacity in children, and maybe even adults, within the next ten years. 3

Although grouping has been with us for some time, it can still be considered an innovation because it is being tried in different ways in different schools to individualize reading instruction. One form of ability grouping is the Joplin Plan where children in all grades are grouped according to their ability. Accelerated reading works well with this plan. Grouping according to sex has also been tried. It didn't show many gains in reading achievement, but it did make the teachers more sensitive to the special needs and interests of the boys. 4

Using other children or community volunteers to listen to the slow readers not only brings good results in reading, but also boosts

3 Smith, Mila B., p. 441.
4 Herman & Crisculo, pp. 97-98.
morale and improves human relations. The volunteers solicited by the Woodridge Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas, gave no instructions, but still saved the teacher valuable time by listening to oral reading.\(^5\)

Both groups made advances when sixth-grade slow readers were assigned to listen to second-grade slow readers in the Forest Crest School at Lynwood, Washington.\(^6\) Taking kindergarteners to the library certainly provides incentive in reading for the fifth- and sixth-graders of the Central Washington State College lab school.\(^7\)

Literature also provides a new approach to reading. Multi-ethnic literature, music, films, and other multi-media materials that meet certain criteria plus manipulative materials and audio-visual aids can be used in place of the basal reading program or as a supplement to it. The child may choose what he wants to read and reports on it to the teacher. The teacher can then listen to each one read individually.

Some schools have set up a special reading room or reading center where a child will receive more individual assistance. These could be made to be more teacher- and administrator-oriented rather than child-oriented. Some have gone so far as to create a readmobile staffed with a coordinator, a reading specialist, and a secretary that travels to the schools.

The Woodward Parkway School in Farmingdale, New York, believes that reading instruction should be preventive rather than remedial. To carry this out, they have set up an intensive readiness program in

\(^5\) Stone, p. 99.
\(^6\) Rime & Ham, p. 105.
\(^7\) Wilson, p. 98.
kindergarten to develop visual-motor coordination, figure-ground perception, smell and taste perception, tactile perception, and an understanding of spatial relationships.⁸

New hardware, the elaborate electronic devices, is being used in some areas to individualize reading instruction. "Many technologists are predicting that all learning in the future may be administered by satellites, computers, talking typewriters, tapes, and the like and that books will become obsolete."⁹ In one experiment a master computer and eighteen terminals were set up in the classroom. No teacher was necessary to operate it. Children set at the terminals and made responses to the computer. The computer can make these answers: "Good!" "No-o-o." "Do it now!" It can even tap a distress signal to a teacher in another room, if, for some reason, the child is not responding.¹⁰ It is the writer's opinion that this signal would have to be used quite often. Computers can't teach children to think or can't communicate with them. There is still a definite need for a teacher in the classroom.

There are more complicated programs that are radically different from the basal reading program such as the talking typewriter used in the New Nursery School, Words-in-Color, and the initial teaching alphabet. Each will be discussed in some depth.

The talking typewriter was developed by Omar Khayyam Moore to be a part of the responsive environment in the New Nursery School. In individual booths he set up a conventional typewriter with colored keys.

---
⁸Douglass & Weitman, pp. 104-105.
⁹Smith, Nila B., p. 443.
¹⁰Ibid, p. 444.
As you remember, the child's initiative decides his program for the day in the New Nursery School. The child may choose one time each day of up to twenty minutes to go into the booth. There the assistant paints the child's fingernails to match the keys. The child then starts on a continuum of four phases of activity. He begins in free exploration with the assistant naming the symbols as he strikes them one at a time. From there he goes to searching for and matching the letters that the assistant names, to typing words shown to him, and finally to writing stories on his own. 11

The results these people claimed at the end of the 1966-67 year were quite impressive. They found that, on the average, a child went to the booth sixty times for twelve minutes each time. Such a program produced rapid gains in language development and developed the mental processes needed for problem-solving and discovering relationships. At the conclusion of this program, when the children were ready to enter regular kindergarten, they were found to have an IQ ten points higher than when they started the program. 12 However, there was no research available to show that this gain was maintained in the kindergarten or no scores that would show if such a program could improve the child's actual achievement in kindergarten.

Words-in-Color is based on the idea that reading is recorded speech. The man who developed this system, Dr. Caleb Gattegno, believes that the teacher's problem is "helping the learner to understand the connection between the temporal aspects of spoken speech and the

11Nimmricht, p. 36.
12Ibid.
spatial arrangement of print. 13 The child takes his ability to communicate for granted. Words-in-Color shows the pupil the written code for his speech which is just a series of sounds uttered in a definite sequence. 14

The learner begins with the simplest letters and their sounds and then proceeds to the complicated spellings for the same sound. The children are first introduced to the five short vowels, each in a distinct color, because they can be sounded in isolation while the consonants cannot. Learning the names for the letters is unnecessary in the early stages because they are known by sound and color only. After the vowels are introduced, four consonants are blended with them beginning with "p" in a shade of brown. Using only these letters in color, the first word chart is introduced. After these are mastered, new sounds with different colors are introduced on continuing charts. There are twenty-one charts in all. 15

The Phonic Code for Words-in-Color is a chart containing nearly all of the sounds of the English language structured in columns. Each column of letters and combination of letters having the same sound has the same color. For example, under "p," in a shade of brown, are "p," "pp," "pe," and "ph." 16

Color doesn't become a crutch, as one might suspect, because it has been used successfully by color-blind pupils. Replies to questionnaires

---

13 Bentley, p. 185.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid, pp. 186-188.
16 Ibid.
show enthusiasm and praise for this system as it brought about independence and confidence in the pupil and significant progress in the slow child.

The author claims that his system can be a complete language arts program. A two-year study of this program and the basal reading program at Indian Hills in Euclid, Ohio, ended in 1966. It showed a significant difference in reading, vocabulary, and spelling in favor of Words-in-Color.\textsuperscript{17}

However, the way this program is to be conducted doesn't allow the teacher to give much praise to the young child who so often needs and wants it.

The high rate of failure among beginning readers and the ever-present spelling errors are often attributed to the inconsistencies in the English language. A simplified and regularized writing system is needed where there is only one symbol for each sound. One such a system that has been devised with this purpose in mind is the initial teaching alphabet, better known as \textit{i.t.a.}. It has a total of forty-four symbols, twenty-four of them taken from the conventional alphabet. (See Appendix, p.38.)

In linguistic terminology, \textit{i.t.a.} is a writing system. This does not necessarily mean a system for teaching writing. What it does mean is a system of ink marks on paper to represent the primary system of sounds in the air which is the spoken language....it is vital to understand that \textit{i.t.a.} is just a writing system, not a teaching method.\textsuperscript{18}

The initial teaching alphabet is only one of a number of simplified and regularized writing systems. The first such an alphabet for English was published in 1570 by John Hart.\textsuperscript{19} In more recent times the

\textsuperscript{17}Bentley, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{18}Downing, "What's Wrong with i.t.a.?" p. 6.

\textsuperscript{19}Downing, "How i.t.a. Began." p. 40.
idea of a regularized writing system was presented to the House of Commons in 1952 by Sir James Pitman. Up until 1963, when it took on the name of "initial teaching alphabet," this writing system existed under the name of "Augmented Roman." The sponsors of the experiment were the University of London Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales. The first step was to publish a pamphlet telling why the experiment was needed. In 1961, an experiment was set up in British schools. 20

The experiment followed two basic principles. It was designed with scientific rigor in order to obtain only valid information and data. For instance, both the experiment group and the control group used basal readers with the same content. The only difference was the writing system used. Also, any tests given in the early period were printed in i.t.a. for those in the experimental group and in T. O. (traditional orthography) for those in the control group. The other principle was that the children were placed in a real-life setting where teachers were allowed to choose their own methods, as is common in British schools. 21 It might be interesting to note here that Prince Edward of England learned to read using i.t.a. in classes at Buckingham Palace. 22

The greater clarification of the structure of English is based on the principle of increasing the frequency of one-to-one relationships between phonemes (speech sounds) and graphemes (symbol or

21 Ibid, p. 43.
22 Downing, "What's Wrong with i.t.a.?" p. 9.
combination of symbols that represent a speech sound). Besides this relationship, there are other values of i.t.a. Pupils learn only one character for each letter of the alphabet. The i.t.a. capitals are just larger than lower case letters. There would be only one visual pattern for each word. With only one symbol for one sound, such confusing words as zoo, shoe, grew, through, do, or blue would be eliminated. The left-to-right rule is never broken. For instance, in such English words as "cape" or "bite" the sound of the second letter is determined by the fourth. Because of the above features, spelling in i.t.a. is simpler and more consistent.

The problem for children using i.t.a. is to make the transfer from it to T.O. The inventor of i.t.a., Sir James Pitman, considered this and made certain stipulations for the transfer. First of all, because research has shown that fluent readers use only minimal clues in the upper part of the line of print, he designed the upper part of i.t.a. configuration to be similar to that of T.O. He didn't feel that children would be ready to make the transfer until mid-second grade. To transfer at that time, they should repeat, in T.O., the i.t.a. reader they had just finished. He suggested the use of contextual clues in the transfer rather than mixing i.t.a. and T.O. 24

A review of the study so far shows that the group has reached three main conclusions. One, traditional orthography is a serious cause of difficulty in the early stages of learning to read and write. Two, the use of i.t.a. generally leads to superior results in T.O.

23 Downing & Rose, p. 181.

reading and in T. O. spelling. Three, the success of i.t.a. in improving literary skills occurs in spite of a setback or regression in the growth of basic skills at the time of transition.²⁵

From these conclusions, they made some recommendations. They felt that the ultimate goal should be to reform T. O. to provide phonemic spelling. Since this is hardly conceivable in the near future, they felt that, in the meantime, the use of a simplified and regularized writing system with a transition to T. O. would be feasible. However, more research is needed in i.t.a. materials and methods and in the timing of the transition to better develop the i.t.a writing system. Diagnostic and standardized tests with their own norms also need to be developed for i.t.a. Teachers will have to be trained in the use of i.t.a. More recommendations could possibly be made if a follow-up study is made of the children in this experiment.²⁶ In British schools, i.t.a. is not instruction for earlier reading as is thought in the United States. Formal state education begins a year earlier in Britain than in the United States, so British teachers in the experiment actually began reading at the usual age.

Although i.t.a experiments in England are scheduled until 1974, there are some factors that make these early appraisals doubtful. There may be some residual effect that could deter fluent reading and accurate spelling that wouldn't be found until the long-range studies are completed. More refined experiments are also needed to determine the types of learners for whom i.t.a. works best and in what type of program it

²⁶Ibid.
works best. "The Hawthorne Effect," the teacher enthusiasm for one method over another, rather than the choice of method, may have caused the students to do better in some cases. Several significant research studies show that late starters tend to catch up and may even surpass those who have received direct, intensive reading instruction early in the first grade or kindergarten, especially when this delayed instruction has been preceded by enriched readiness activities.\textsuperscript{27}

In other studies, officials from a Nevada School system were so pleased with the gains in both reading vocabulary and reading comprehension made by an experimental group using i.t.a. that they recommended the use of it for their schools.\textsuperscript{28} In a poll in another area, teachers reported that they liked i.t.a. and felt that their students were making progress or, at least, that it affected the children in a consistent way.\textsuperscript{29} Teachers from the Immaculate Conception School at Ravenna, Ohio, perceived gains not only in reading ability, but in other areas as well. Using i.t.a. children developed a greater love for reading, a greater satisfaction resulting from self-confidence in being able to read without a struggle, an unquenchable desire to read, a serious attitude toward study, a greater accuracy in spelling, an unhampered creativity in writing, and a willingness to tackle any task requiring the skill to read.\textsuperscript{30}

Even the most ardent supporters will agree that i.t.a. does

\textsuperscript{27}Cutts, pp.183-184.

\textsuperscript{28}Trione & Larson, pp. 96-101.

\textsuperscript{29}Gilfooly, p. 549.

\textsuperscript{30}Ronald, p. 37.
have some faults. It is not a cure-all for reading problems as is sometimes claimed. We often expect too much of something that is claimed to be a panacea. Conflicting statements over the copyright is also causing trouble for i.t.a. The inventor specified that there be no copyright on his work so that others would be able to work with the idea and perhaps even improve it. Therefore, there are many materials on the market that are labelled i.t.a., but are not. There are many misconceptions and ideas that are linked with i.t.a. in the United States, but are not recognized in Britain where i.t.a. started. One of the most dangerous misconceptions is that the transition to T. O. has to be at the last of the first year. British teachers make the transition on an individual basis or, at least, not until the end of the second year.\textsuperscript{31} Forcing the child to make the transition before he is able would defeat the whole purpose of the program.

If these faults are eventually corrected, there are still some questions to be asked before the program can be accepted wholeheartedly. Are there some less confusing ways to reach the same goal? Is there too much publicity possibly forcing an early adoption of such a system? Are the gains made with i.t.a. permanent? How does i.t.a. affect beginning handwriting? How does i.t.a. affect reading comprehension? How does it affect the child in a highly mobile family who may move into or out of school districts using i.t.a.? How will it affect all of the conventional reading material such as magazines, newspapers, and signs?\textsuperscript{32}

These questions will not be easily answered, but it does seem that i.t.a.

\textsuperscript{31} Downing, "What's Wrong with i.t.a.?" p. 8.

\textsuperscript{32} Enstrom, pp. 47-49.
is a step towards a simplified and regularized writing system.

These innovations are directed at replacing or, at least, making a drastic change in the basal reading program. It is often blamed for reading failures, but, instead, couldn't it be the people who use it and how they use it? Over 85% of all teachers use the basal reading program so there must be something that they feel is good about it, something that brings about good results through the pleasure of reading.

Although each publishing company produces it own series with materials to accompany it, there are certain similarities between them. The basal reading program is usually designed by well-qualified persons in the area of education using a step-by-step approach. Manipulative aids, audio-visual aids, and many other types of materials are also designed by these authors to be used in correlation with the reading material. Taking advantage of the availability of these materials and using them in a creative way allows the program to be used in classes ranging from remedial reading, where the child needs much repetition, to individualized reading classes, where materials from any level are made available to the child. The basal reading program can be an integrated approach to phonics, comprehension, appreciation of literature, intelligent listening, oral language, critical reading, and creative writing. Teachers realize, too, that these ideals will not be achieved if the basal program is the only reading matter presented to the children. Another basal series can be the supplementary reading that tests the series used regularly in the school to see if the learnings there

---

Deierhoi, pp. 18-19.
will carry over into other reading areas. 34

Another big argument against the basal reading program is the content and the language used. Many authorities feel that the child must be able to identify with the characters and situations in the stories. For example, the educationally disadvantaged child described earlier in this paper will not be able to identify with the middle-class white child who lives in a house of his own and has a family complete with both a mother and a father. The authors are trying to correct this with new, up-to-date stories that are interesting to the child or with the new multi-ethnic series that are situated in the slum or ghetto. On the other hand, how can we hope to raise the sights of these children if we show them nothing but their own surroundings? The language in any of these stories may seem quite boring to us as adults, but it was not written for us to read. 35 Although this, too, has been corrected to some degree, children are so excited about learning to read, especially in the first grade, that the material is far from boring for them.

Before leaving the area of innovations in reading, there is the question of whether to teach reading in kindergarten or not. The Cooperative Research Project directed by Paul McKee and Joseph Brzeinski studied children from kindergarten through fifth grade in Denver, Colorado, who had been taught reading in kindergarten. This experiment began in 1960 and ended in 1966. 36 Four thousand children from the Denver Public

34 Deierhoi, pp. 18-19
35 Ibid.
36 Personske, p. 576.
Schools were divided into two groups, a control group and an experimental group. During the kindergarten year, the experimental group was given special reading instruction for twenty minutes each day.\(^\text{37}\)

Materials developed by Paul McKee and M. Lucille Harrison were used by the teaching staff to develop certain skills that lead to independent reading. They used no tricks or gimmicks, but worked to develop such skills as identifying the letters of the alphabet, unlocking words on the basis of beginning word sounds, and using context clues to determine unfamiliar words, all without placing much emphasis on the learning of sight words.\(^\text{38}\) The teacher began the program by leaving out a word in a sentence and the children had to provide words that would finish the sentence in an acceptable way. The child was encouraged to think of as many words as possible. From there, the child learned the letters and the initial consonant sounds. This limited the answers the child could give as he tried to finish a sentence, because the teachers gave the sound or displayed the letter of the missing word. Finally, the words were displayed and the child had to choose the right word. Here only one word would fit correctly.\(^\text{39}\)

At the end of the kindergarten year, both groups were divided again for further study. In the first grade, groups I and II, taken from the control group, were given the regular reading program and the experimental reading program respectively. The experimental kindergarten group was also divided again. Group III was shifted back to regular

\(^{37}\)Erzeinski, p. 23

\(^{38}\)"To Read or Not to Read in Kindergarten." p. 154.

\(^{39}\)Erzeinski, p. 23.
instruction in the first grade while group IV continued to receive the experimental program. 40

Findings of the Denver experiment show that the children developed the skill in identifying new printed words by using context and beginning sounds. The experimental kindergarten group showed the greatest speed in reading and the greatest gains in reading comprehension and vocabulary. However, these gains were lost if the children did not receive the experimental program in later grades. There was no evidence of any of the social, psychological, or physical problems that had been predicted. 41

It is interesting to note that the city of Denver now requires reading instruction in the regular kindergarten program as a result of this six-year study. 42 Certainly the results are a clear implication to re-evaluate kindergarten goals and the goals of later grades. Children are ready to learn to read and expect to their first day in school. Teachers should take advantage of this because the child will never be better motivated. Due to television and our highly mobile society the child comes to school knowing more and having a tremendous vocabulary.

Some authorities are raising serious questions concerning the results of the program. They accuse the directors of molding the child to the program instead of making the program fit the child. Those supporting the program claim that it doesn't cause any reading disabilities, but they don't claim to prevent it. There are also some

40 Erzeinski, p. 23.
42 "To Read or Not to Read in Kindergarten." p. 153.
about the strength of the research design and the length of the study. More studies beyond the fifth grade need to be made.

In the writer's opinion, the controversy caused by this experiment is somewhat unnecessary. Isn't reading taught from the very first day when we label the objects in the room or teach a child to recognize and write his own name? In most states, kindergarten is not a part of the public school system and their programs are far from uniform, even within the state of city. Some teachers feel that kindergarten should be more of a social experience rather than an educational one. Possibly the uniformity the Denver reading experiment brought to the kindergarten program contributed to its success.

43 Personke, pp. 577-578.
CONCLUSION

We have talked for a long time about the conditions for learning. Long ago we discovered that effective learning takes place when the circumstances recognize and provide for individual differences, readiness, motivation, interest, creativity, appropriate organizational arrangements, availability of multi-level materials, etc. ...that we have not been effective in keeping our school in gear with the needs of the youth.¹

Education seemed dormant and in a rut until after the launching of the Russian Sputnik in 1957. This awakened the American people to the fact that changes had to be made on the educational scene if they were to stay ahead of the Russians in the Cold War and if they were to be able to cope with life in the push-button world. The sixties also brought to light the plight of the poor in a supposedly prosperous nation. Educators put their heads together to see what could be done. Today, this great rush to innovation almost dictates the direction of the educational field.

Innovation should be a part of every undertaking, but it has been given a bad name in the field of education. Too many times fancy words and phrases with no fundamental changes have been substituted for true innovation. One of the reasons for this is that few administrators are brave enough to try actual innovation. It is difficult and expensive to put into operation and there are too few examples to follow.

¹Garrison, p. 432
This paper has attempted to study some of the true innovations of early childhood education. The writer asks that educators consider, when contemplating any change, that the teacher is still the most significant factor in the achievement of the children. No innovation will succeed unless the teacher has been properly trained. Rather than working to improve the separate areas of education, work instead to improve the area of teacher training.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Essays


Magazine Articles

Abbott, Janet M. "Men in the Kindergarten," The Education Digest. 33:45; April, 1968.


"What Rationale Can You Come to About Reading?" Instructor. 77:93-94; March, 1968.


--------. "What's Wrong with i.t.a.?" *The Education Digest.* 32:6-9; May, 1967.


Minnich, Glen. "Low-Cost Typewriter Approach Helps Pre-Schoolers Type Words and Stories." *Nation's Schools.* 80:34-37; December, 1967.


Scissons, Paul A. "Reading Room." *Instructor.* 77:100; March, 1968.


"To Read or Not to Read in Kindergarten." *Grade Teacher.* 85:153-155; May/June, 1968.


APPENDIX

The Initial Teaching Alphabet: Symbols and Sounds