THE INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET:
AN INTRODUCTION

AN HONORS THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE HONORS COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
for the
HONORS PROGRAM

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of purpose. The purpose of this paper is to determine the value of the Initial Teaching Alphabet as a means of teaching beginning reading. Included in this evaluative study is information concerning the background and development of the Initial Teaching Alphabet, its philosophy and results of some of the major research studies underway at the present time. In addition to this, the paper includes a description of both the program which uses the Initial Teaching Alphabet and the basal reading program with emphasis placed on comparative aspects of the two.

Importance of study. A study of the Initial Teaching Alphabet is important primarily because it deals with teaching children to read. Research has shown that learning to read is vitally important to the educational development and success of children and therefore a task which should be made as pleasant and rewarding as possible. As each starry-eyed, six-year-old enters the first grade, he unknowingly places a great deal of trust in that person and means which will eventually teach him to read.

Reading and the other basic areas of language arts; writing, listening and speaking, are closely related and together make up the basis of all communication, whether it is between people or between nations. Those people who are most adept in these communicative skills and their uses
will find living and getting along with other people much easier tasks than those who are not.

The Initial Teaching Alphabet is a relatively new and different approach to the tasks of teaching reading and the art of communication, and as such deserves every change to be recognized and studied.

Definition of terms. Throughout this paper, certain terms will be used frequently and knowledge of their meaning is a prerequisite to full understanding.

Initial teaching alphabet. This is the name which has been given to the forty-four symbol alphabet used to teach children to read and is the subject of this paper. It shall also be referred to as i/t/a.

Traditional orthography. This is the term given to the traditional means of spelling and writing the English language. It shall be referred to as t/o.

Phoneme. This term designates each of the forty-four separate speech-sounds which make up the English language.

Fifty years of reading development. For complete understanding and before any further study of the Initial Teaching Alphabet is begun, it is necessary to investigate the development of reading during the last fifty years. This period has been termed by Nila Banton Smith as the "golden period in the progress of reading instruction."
Between 1910 and 1920 the major emphasis in reading development was concentrated in the area of research and the application of scientific techniques to the study of the reading process. This was the time when the first standardized tests were used to measure reading achievement. In addition to this scientific emphasis, there was initiated a study of silent reading, thought by some to be a significant answer to reading difficulties.

After 1920, there were more and more research studies begun, particularly in the area of silent versus oral reading until, toward the end of the decade, educators were beginning to see value in using both these reading techniques in a combined program of instruction. Out of some of the studies made during this period came the birth of two more concepts, reading readiness and remedial reading, which are taken for granted today.²

More investigations and studies were made during the 1930's with emphasis still being given to the importance of readiness and before long still different trends began. By 1940 educators were beginning to study the reading process and some of the various reasons behind difficulties encountered at the higher grade levels. With this developed an awareness of the interrelationship existing between reading success and success in the other areas of language arts. During the 1940's also came the "birth of the atomic age."³ With Fermi's first nuclear energy machine in 1942 and the destruction of Hiroshima in 1945 came the thought-provoking question of how to cope with future nuclear destruction without more efficient reading and a wider reading public.

By mid-century, in 1950, the concept of individual differences was evident and there emerged a growing realization of the complexity contained
in the processes of reading and learning to read. Television, radio and the other avenues of mass communication were well-developed by this time and their effects were also being seen in children as they began to read.

Today, as always before, the primary goal in beginning reading is to help children acquire the abilities and skills necessary to learn to read. Because of all of the research that has taken place during this past fifty years, a great deal is known about reading today. Actually, reading is learning to derive meaning and ideas from printed symbols. It is an abstract process and therefore very complicated and difficult to teach. Of all the modern languages, English probably has the most erratic and irregular orthography of all. Perhaps this is the price to be paid for its composite origin. Although the elementary teachers are aware of this fact, parents who have read for many years do not have their background and find it difficult to remember what a complex process learning to read really is. If their child is not learning to read at the same pace as the other children, they often become anxious and "pushy," making the child feel insecure and the task of teaching him an even more difficult one.

The concept of reading readiness is explained as the process by which an educator can determine when a child is intellectually and emotionally ready to learn to read and is another factor in making reading a difficult skill to teach. Some people seem to consider readiness as something that just bursts forth at the age of six or six and one half. However, this is not what happens, but is a process which continues throughout the child's early years. Nila Banton Smith suggests that there are nine separate factors
to deal with in readiness or reading maturation. These are intelligence, physical fitness, cultural background, home and community experience, social experience, emotional development, language ability, attendance at kindergarten and informal reading experience. With all these factors to consider, it is not difficult to understand why teachers make most of their errors of judgment in assuming a child is ready to read when in reality he is not.

The other important factor in making the teaching of reading such a difficult task is the concept of individual differences. These include not only the recognition of mental and physical handicaps, but also emotional and cultural factors which may interfere with the learning process. All children are very different and learn in different ways and at different rates. It takes the full cooperation of parents, students, and teacher to understand these differences, cope with them, and develop in the child the all-important inner desire to learn to read.

These last fifty years have indeed been a "golden period" in the development and understanding of reading, but work cannot stop now. The future must hold in store greater accomplishments with the initiation of more research and depth studies, the development of new theories and the investigation of new ideas. The Initial Teaching Alphabet has emerged within the last few years as a result of this forward looking philosophy.

**Purpose and design of the initial teaching alphabet.** The Initial Teaching Alphabet is a phonemic alphabet, that is, it has been created with one symbol
corresponding to each of the forty-four speech sounds or phonemes in the English language. It tries to insure that beginning stages in learning to read are met easily and without frustration. One author aptly wrote of English spelling as "a poor carpenter job of trying to nail together sounds from German, Anglo-Saxon, and other tongues with Latin letters." Because i/t/a is phonemic in design, it attempts to simplify this construction job and the task of learning to read by providing the child with a more logical code.

Because it is important to make an easy transition from the i/t/a back into the traditional alphabet, the designers of i/t/a have made several compromises. The first of these is that both the c and k are kept to reduce the number of words whose spellings would have to be changed at transition as in the word b a c k. The second compromise is that most of the double symbols have been kept, such as in the word let t e r and the third aid to transition is that i/t/a has tried to insure that the top-coast line or the upper half of words remain relatively the same. For example, ch in t/o looks like ch in i/t/a.

The Initial Teaching Alphabet, it is emphasized, is not designed as a spelling reform, but rather, as its name implies, an aid to children in their initial efforts of learning to read. When the child has developed an efficient reading skill in i/t/a, he is ready to make the transition from ti to t/o. This is usually accomplished near the end of the first grade.

The Initial Teaching Alphabet might also be termed the "initial confidence alphabet" because it does attempt to give the early reader and writer some
taste of success before he is thrown into the "chaos of English spelling." In addition to being used to teach "normal" first grade children to read, i/t/a has been suggested for use in the areas of teaching remedial reading and teaching reading to slow learners and mentally retarded children.

This phonemic alphabet is relatively new, having been introduced in Britain and the United States within the last four years. Because of its newness and uniqueness, much has been published about it. A look at some of this material is quite beneficial to persons interested in it.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER ONE


2Ibid. p. 54.

3Ibid. p. 42.


6Ibid. pp. 455-458.


CHAPTER II
RELATED LITERATURE

In these last fifty years, reading has been taught in a number of different ways. At the first of the century, oral reading was predominant and then emphasis was placed on silent reading skills. Since then, the spotlight of emphasis has gone from phonics, to language experience, to individualized reading programs, to the Science Research Associates' "track" program. All these different techniques have provided success for some people at some time.

Currently, the reading spotlight is turning to the Initial Teaching Alphabet and many people have had much to say about it. Articles dealing with i/t/a are found in almost all current professional education journals and in many popular periodicals. More technical releases can be obtained from the Initial Teaching Alphabet Publishing Company in New York City, the United States Office of Education, and from cities in which there are studies underway, particularly Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Perhaps the most recent and complete explanation of i/t/a and its development appears in the book, The Story of the Initial Teaching Alphabet by Maurice Harrison.¹

Survey of literature. The Initial Teaching Alphabet was not the first attempt to teach children to read by the use of a phonemic or symbol-sound alphabet. As a matter of fact, similar experiments were taking place as far back as the early 1840's.
One of the earliest phonemic alphabets, called Phonotypy, was devised by A. J. Ellis and Sir Isaac Pitman, a schoolmaster from Somerset in England. Their experiments began in a number of schools in the United States in 1844. Later, between 1852 and 1860, ten schools in Waltham, Massachusetts, were chosen and Phonotypy was used with eight hundred children for teaching beginning reading. Although little was known at that time about valid testing techniques, the reports obtained indicated that:

...the saving of time in teaching the children to read and spell enabled us to introduce exercises for eye and hand...the phonetic print corrected the brogue of the Irish children and the Yankee dialect of the Americans.

In the schools of Saint Louis, between 1866 and 1886, an experiment on a larger scale was conducted. A different alphabet was used, but it, too, aimed at the systematic relationship between symbol and English phoneme. Results of this experiment were taken to the United States' Bureau of Education and soon after, official circulars were printed claiming that this systematized spelling resulted in a saving of one to two and one half years' time needed for learning to read.

During these experiments, educators in Great Britain remained interested and finally between 1915 and 1924 fifteen British schools were chosen and similar studies were initiated in them. This study and the previously mentioned studies were severely criticized in the ensuing years because of their lack of valid experimental techniques. However, due to their similarity in outcomes, the suggestions that further exploration into this area might prove educationally valuable was indicated.
In the summer of 1960 with these indications well in mind, Sir James Pitman, grandson of Sir Isaac Pitman who developed Phonotypy, took a new phonical alphabet, or as he called it, his Augmented Roman Alphabet to the Institute of Education at the University of London. There, in association with the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, a group of interested persons undertook to look into its possibilities. In October of the same year, after much deliberation and some changing of the original Alphabet, the whole project was placed into the hands of Research Officer, James Downing, a psychologist with teaching experience in primary and secondary schools and research experience in education and industry. Before actual studies began, Mr. Downing had as his first task to choose children's books and reading materials to be transliterated into the new alphabet, now renamed the Initial Teaching Alphabet.

The studies and experiments began in Britain soon after these first tasks were completed and before long news of the work traveled far. One of the first Americans to react to these experiments was Mr. Philip Hilaire, who was at that time a reading consultant to the United States Air Force Dependents' Schools in England. He began to write to his home in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and to friends at Lehigh University about this new alphabet.

In the summer of 1961, Mr. Hilaire flew home from England on leave and brought the Initial Teaching Alphabet with him. As soon as he arrived, he began to arouse interest in i/t/a among educators in the Bethlehem school system and those at Lehigh University. Dr. Rebecca Stewart, Director of
Elementary Education, became convinced after waiting for further reports from England that i/t/a contained no "concealed time bomb" and urged her superintendent, Dr. Charles E. Chaffee, to initiate an i/t/a experiment in Bethlehem. After talking to the elementary school principals in his system and obtaining their agreement, Dr. Chaffee went to Lehigh University and the head of the reading clinic, Dr. Albert Mazurkiewicz, for further assistance. Being very much interested in the project himself, Dr. Mazurkiewicz obtained a grant of $148,000 for Lehigh from the Fund for the Advancement of Education and a three-year project was planned.  

Much work had to be done to initiate such an experiment; classes had to be chosen, materials made available, teachers selected and trained and standards and methodology set up. The project officially got underway late in the summer of 1963 with a two and one-half day workshop and training session for the teachers. This time was spent identifying two prime areas of importance; how to write the i/t/a symbols and how to spell using them. Most teachers found learning the alphabet symbols quite easy, but admitted some difficulty in learning to transcribe their sounds into print. Dr. Mazurkiewicz decided that it would be more beneficial to the students if the symbols were taught in order of their frequency in use rather than in relation to alphabetical order and so instructed these eager teachers. Generally, however, teaching methods would remain a great deal the same with emphasis being given to individualized and small homogeneous group instruction whenever possible. It was also stressed that the beginning stages in learning to read in i/t/a were very much the same as the beginning
stages in learning to write. Therefore, methodology emphasized the
deciphering of the printed code by teaching children to associate each of
the forty-four symbols with the spoken sound it represented to help create
a parallel development in learning to read and write.

During this time, Dr. Mazurkiewicz and his associates were working
on the development of i/t/a teaching materials. Soon they had completed
several books in a graded series and various other types of visual teaching
aids.

At long last, in September 1963, actual teaching of i/t/a began in
fifteen first grades, three special education classes and one handicapped
class in Bethlehem. As a basis for observation and comparison of results,
these classes were matched as closely as possible with classes taught by
traditional methods.

In this study, as in any similar study, certain inevitable variables
have to be taken into consideration and these are the basis for much of the
criticism directed at the experiment. For example, who is to know for
certain what effect the attitude of the teacher toward her teaching medium
might have on the outcomes, or perhaps the different methods used by
different teachers, or the amount of training or help given to one teacher
as opposed to another. From another point of view, the creators of this
experiment must also consider home background and socio-economic
differences as a basis for faulty judgments. It has been found that certain
direct relationships exist between family circumstances, parental attitudes,
and linguistic skills. 9
In addition to these questions, the initiators of this demonstration had to consider whether the "newness" or excitement of the experimental situation and the enthusiasm shown by so many people could have any direct effect on their results. In the end, and before any final evaluation could possibly be made, all of these variables and inconsistencies must be taken into consideration.

In England, after three years of experimentation, the results seem to indicate that the Initial Teaching Alphabet permitted pupils to get away to a much more rapid start in reading than traditional methods. In fact, it has been reported that in general terms, after two years, there were two hundred percent better results in classes using i/t/a when compared to the traditional system. Britain also reports superior reading skills after transfer into traditional orthography based on results obtained from administering the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (Form A) tests in t/o. After eighteen months at school, the average i/t/a pupil scored twenty-three for accuracy and eight for comprehension on this test as compared to scores of nine and four respectively for the child who had been taught by traditional methods from the beginning.

By the middle of their third year in school, the i/t/a taught children were also showing significantly superior results in spelling. The Schonell's Graded Word Spelling Test was administered to both i/t/a and t/o classes. Although it was given in its t/o form, forty-nine or fifteen percent of the i/t/a children had not made the transition. Results showed that the i/t/a children attained a mean score of more than twenty-eight as compared to the
traditionally taught children with a mean score of just over twenty-four. (See Appendix III, Table I.) As an example of these overall results, Gerald Stanley, a five-year-old, was considered the reading champion of his English school by reading and understanding two hundred fifty books in his first year.12

In Bethlehem, after one year of using i/t/a, the results have indicated similar outcomes. During the year, both the i/t/a and the control classes were kept under very close observation and frequent testing did take place. At the end of the sixth month of teaching instruction, the Botel Word Recognition Inventory was chosen as the test which seemed suitable for both the control classes and, after transliteration, for the i/t/a classes. Botel explained that an achievement of seventy to eighty percent word recognition at any level indicates the child's instructional level. Sub-samples, which were statistically equivalent in respect to chronological age and I.Q. to the major populations were given the test and results indicated that "some i/t/a children achieve a higher point in equivalent time and that a significantly greater number of children achieve third reader instructional level."13 Almost fifty-eight percent of the i/t/a population achieved at the 3, 1 or higher instructional level as compared to only three and six-tenths percent of the traditionally taught children. (See Appendix IV, Table II.)

Dr. Mazurkiewicz reports that at the end of nine months, or sometime near the end of May 1964, standardized tests in their t/o form were given to document the status of both populations. One child, feeling this unfair to those who had just made transition commented that "We'll take this test
if the other kids take a test printed in our alphabet. Populations were chosen and matched to within two points in I.Q., socio-economic status, sex and age and were examined for any differences. These populations included only those from the i/t/a group who could be considered to have made transition by being solely in t/o materials for at least a week. The Lower Primary California Reading Test was used. The difference in distribution in test scores, again favoring the i/t/a population, was readily apparent. Approximately ninety-one percent of the i/t/a population achieved at the second grade level or above as compared to slightly over sixty-seven percent of the t/o population. (See Appendix V, Table III.)

Plans and work did not stop at the end of this first year, but more plans and a great deal more effort got underway for the second year. In September 1964, a second form of the Lower Primary California Reading Test was administered to observe how much learning was retained or forgotten during the summer months. The results seemed to indicate an upward drift in t/o in the i/t/a taught children, suggesting that some self-transition activities continued to occur. (See Appendix VI, Table IV.) Similar retests were given in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension and the i/t/a populations again showed significant gains.

These early results indicate to the research and lay people involved in the experiment that i/t/a may indeed be a great boon to beginning reading, but on the other hand, these same people have to admit that they could also indicate the infiltration of numerous variable as yet unaccounted for.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER TWO


3 Ibid.


7 Ibid.


11 "Reading All of a Sudden," *Life* (LV, November 1, 1963), p. 45.


13 Ibid. p. 10.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Determining the value of the Initial Teaching Alphabet was the task undertaken in this paper. A number of different methods or approaches were utilized in order to obtain the needed information.

Much of the pertinent and available information concerning the history, development and current studies in i/t/a and also information about the other approaches to beginning reading was found in different kinds of printed material. These included articles from popular and professional journals, releases from the Initial Teaching Alphabet Publishing Company in New York City, and publications of the United States Office of Education. Material of this type was thoroughly read and abridged to give basic background facts and to show comparisons between i/t/a and another medium used to teach beginning reading.

Workshops to explain the use and purpose of the Initial Teaching Alphabet are being conducted all over the country. Dr. Albert Mazurkiewicz of Lehigh University conducted one of these workshops at Indiana Central College in October 1964, and a report of this was given by Mrs. Mary F. Teeguarden, a remedial reading instructor in the Metropolitan School District of Washington Township, Marion County, Indiana. This report confirmed much of the information contained in the previously mentioned sources and added some insight into the teaching methods used with i/t/a. Another interesting presentation about the possible value of i/t/a was held in the Burris School
Auditorium in Muncie, Indiana, on April 24, 1965. This session was conducted by Dr. Robert Chasnoff, a professor at Newark State College in Union, New Jersey, who is doing a great deal of research in the area of the educational possibilities of i/t/a.

Lastly, information was desired about the actual use of i/t/a in the classroom and about teachers' reactions to using this strange new alphabet. A questionnaire (See Appendix, p. ...) was designed to give this type of information, mimeographed and sent with enclosed self-addressed stamped envelopes to coordinators of i/t/a projects underway at the present time. A letter was enclosed asking that these coordinators give the questionnaires to teachers who had used i/t/a in their classrooms. Since the sample is so very small, no formal presentation of results is included in the paper. However, the results have been tabulated and appear on the copy of the questionnaire in the Appendix. Also, certain of the teachers' comments have been used for illustrative purposes. The number of questionnaires sent to the coordinators was determined by the size of the particular experiment in progress. A total of forty-seven were sent to the following people:

Mrs. Ann Rezek - 3  
Elementary Supervisor  
Emmaus Public Schools  
Emmaus, Pennsylvania

Miss Anita Metzger - 3  
Anita Metzger School  
Ventnor, New Jersey

Mrs. Tina Thoburn - 5  
Research Associate  
Greater Cleveland E.R.C.  
Cleveland, Ohio
Sister M. Kathleen O., P. - 3
Our Lady of the Elms Preschool
Akron, Ohio

Dr. J. D. Leavitt - 3
Bay Village City Schools
Bay Village, Ohio

Mr. Robert G. Thompson - 3
Instructional Supervisor
Lompoc City Schools
Lompoc, California

Dr. Robert Dykstra - 3
University of Minnesota
College of Education
Owantonna, Minnesota

Mr. Robert Newman - 3
Principal of the Lower School
University of Chicago Lab. School
Chicago, Illinois

Mr. John McConnell - 3
Director, Windward School
White Plains, New York

Mrs. Jane Rusk - 5
Supervisor of Elementary Education
Akron City Schools
Akron, Ohio

Mr. Sammuel S. Shohen - 3
Reading Consultant
Freeport City Schools
Freeport, New York

Mrs. Nona Chern - 3
Reading Consultant
Media City Schools
Media, Pennsylvania

Mrs. Rebecca Stewart - 7
Director of Elementary Education
Bethlehem City Schools
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
After these materials were all collected and the information used in various parts of this paper, thought was given to a final analysis and evaluation. A summary of the paper and its purpose and the conclusions reached in this evaluative study are given in the final chapter of the paper.
CHAPTER IV
MAJOR FINDINGS

Before final evaluation can be made of the Initial Teaching Alphabet, its results must be compared to the other approaches to teaching now in use. For example, how does i/t/a compare to the popular basal reading program? Their broadest objectives are the same, that is, they both are designed to aid young children in learning to read. However, the means and medium used to reach these ends are quite diverse.

Philosophy of the Initial Teaching Alphabet. The basic philosophy underlying the use of i/t/a is two-fold. First, it attempts to lighten the load of inconsistencies found in the English language. This is accomplished in several ways, the first being that there is one and only one symbol for each of the forty-four English phonemes or speech sounds. This tells the reader that each and every time he says a particular sound, he knows that it will be written or spelled in the same way. He also knows that for each different symbol he sees, he will say one and only one sound. Secondly, there are fewer whole word representations in i/t/a. There are no separate capital forms or separate print symbols to be learned. The capitals are made by making the small letter larger. Thirdly, i/t/a has a consistency in direction. A reader will not come across a word which should fall into a verbal pattern, but which has a "silent" or "magical" e at the end forcing
him to reverse direction and look at the word again. Because i/t/a is phonemic, it adapts itself easily to various dialects; eastern nasal tones, southern slang, and midwestern twang. In these different areas, teachers can teach the i/t/a spellings to fit the local pronunciation.

The second half of i/t/a's two-fold philosophy has to do with the hoped for results. Having provided for initial success in learning to read, i/t/a hopes for more rapid future progress, thus creating a better-read and more learned citizenry. It is this part of i/t/a's program which has yet to be evaluated, because of the time factor involved. It is also this part of the program on which rests final judgment of i/t/a's success or failure. If, in the final analysis of research, both the control group of children being taught using traditional methods and the experimental group being taught with i/t/a are relatively equal in reading ability and interest, the push for changing beginning reading to i/t/a because it has a more rapid start will carry little weight. As Mr. John Downing, director of the i/t/a program in England, has said: "Most educators would probably agree that the expense of changing beginning reading materials, training teachers..... can only be justified if the end result, after transfer, is significantly superior attainment in reading t/o."1

Philosophy of basal reading program. The philosophy behind a basal reading program, on the other hand, is quite different. It is an attempt to teach in a systematic fashion the inconsistencies in the English language such as silent letters, multiple spellings for a single sound and more than
one print symbol. The basal programs are designed for children and purposefully related to their experience. The readers, though only one part of the total basal program, are the basis of it. They are designed to develop essential abilities and attitudes necessary for the intricate process of learning to read.

Another of the basal program's basic tenets is its claim for continuity in learning experience. The reading a child does in the first or fifth grade is related to his experience, past and future; it does not stand alone. Therefore, basal readers develop a vertical plan of organization in which each lesson must be valuable not only by itself, but in terms of the gradual development of reading skills and habits. A skill cannot be introduced and then dropped. Therefore, because children are ready for particular learnings at different times, the well-planned basal program offers opportunities for these learnings at different times and in different settings. One experience or skill should lead right on to another, from book to book and grade to grade.

A. Sterl Artley says this in another way, suggesting that basal reading has three main objectives: scope, sequence, and organization. Scope is the range of needed skills and attitudes, sequence tells the order of what is to be learned and organization brings these into proper relationship for a program of unity and coherence.²

Points of comparison. The programs of the Initial Teaching Alphabet and the basal reading idea can be compared on several points. Since there are strong and weak points in both programs, neither can completely block
out the other, but a knowledge of these comparisons is helpful in making
final judgments.

In using the Initial Teaching Alphabet, a child works all year or a
large part of it learning to use a strange looking alphabet, only to find that
he must stop at the end of the year and learn something different. However,
since almost one-half of i/t/a is exactly like traditional orthography, the
new learning is not completely different. Many of the words are written in
exactly the same manner as traditionally and naturally these are used first
in transition. But those inconsistencies which the child was sheltered from
meeting earlier in first grade, must now be met by him. In short, it seems
that i/t/a breaks the continuity which the basal program feels is to important.

The textbooks used in i/t/a and the basal program are a basis for
another point of comparison. Each has its own particular strengths and
weaknesses which add to or subtract from the total program. The basal
readers have been severely criticized because of the monotony of their content
and also because of the formality in their structure. Some people feel that
although it is basic to the program, not all of their content actually grows
from the true experiences and needs of children. Another point of criticism
about the basal readers is the lack of sufficient vocabulary development.
From a study done in New York City with fifteen classes in four different
schools has come the report that the children "...appeared to have little more
difficulty with the 'new' words in the fourth grade basal books which had not
been used in the school than with words already encountered in earlier basal
books."³ On the other hand, Arthur Gates reports that since 1920 the authors
of basal readers have gradually reduced the vocabulary burden and that teachers found those easier books more satisfactory for use in developing the many complex skills used in reading. 4

In the areas of text illustration and teachers' guides, the basal readers generally rank very high. The illustrations are colorful and provide for a great deal of oral expression from the children. The teachers' guides are quite ample with many different suggestions and some definite instruction for developing certain concepts. They are not rigid but allow for variation and flexibility on the part of the teacher who varies activities to meet individual needs.

The i/t/a series of seven books are unusual in many different ways. Not only are they printed in the new phonemic alphabet, but they also provide very interesting stories, much new vocabulary and unusual illustrations. Many of the stories have come from the Humpty Dumpty Magazine and others are modified classics having plot, suspense, and humor. However, they contain no poetry and the first two books still use the stilted language so criticized in the basal readers. 5 Another point to consider is that these collections of stories are unrelated, having no central characters who are dominant throughout any one book. In this way, there again seems to be a lack of continuity which is evident in the basal program. The illustrations found in these books are unusual, too. Instead of the beautifully colored children, parents and pets, there are bold and sometimes crude drawings in black and flat color which would not seem to arouse the verbal output which is so valuable in a child's total language development.
Sir James Pitman, originator of the Initial Teaching Alphabet, has said that i/t/a is a medium and not a method. This is true up to a point, but if for some reason a child does not grasp the very essentials of this medium, he will be unable to understand anything that is taught using it. It is difficult to use in another way because there are so few materials available with which to teach as compared to the materials printed in the traditional alphabet. A teacher cannot go to trade books very easily or to another series to help certain students because they are just not available. Here, then, there is the idea of meeting individual needs. For the very fast students who grasp ideas easily, going through the seven books in the i/t/a series may not take very long, once the alphabet symbols are learned. But if they finish and start transition ahead of the rest of the class, they would certainly be stifled somewhat because the daily classroom activities such as spelling words, experience charts and written material on the board would still have to be written in i/t/a. In the other extreme, there is the very slow student who is unable to grasp this new alphabet. What is to be done with him? What other way can be used to help him when again all the classroom activities are conducted in i/t/a? Several teachers who have used i/t/a in their classroom and to whom questionnaires were sent felt that this was a definite problem.

In a basal or co-basal situation the teacher can remedy these situations to a degree. At least she has the flexibility of using different books, different motivational materials and entirely different approaches without having difficulty in finding materials. But here, too, trouble will arise when the
teacher fails to use the series to its best advantage, or when she does not know when or how to try different approaches. One author has said this: "The fault lies not in the materials nor in the way designed, but in their restricted use." In the end, it is necessary to remember the priceless value of the teachers. A teacher who radiates enthusiasm about what she is teaching and how she is teaching it, will go much farther with her children than one who does not have this extra sparkle and interest, no matter what her method or medium.

Teacher comments. What do some of the teachers who have used i/t/a in their classrooms think about its program? It has been found from magazine articles, school reports, and from personal comments on the i/t/a questionnaires sent to various parts of the country in connection with research on this paper that teachers are generally very enthusiastic about the use of i/t/a. Several different areas of discussion were specifically pointed out. The first and possibly most discussed result of the use of i/t/a was the new abundance of delightful creative writing. A supervisor in one district says this: "They write more abundantly and about many more subjects. They write alone... sounding out their own spellings and using any word in any sentence pattern that occurs to them." In filling out one questionnaire, a teacher commented that her children even used such words as "ferocious" and "supersonic" because they were able to sound them out using i/t/a. Another teacher commented that through this creative writing she could better understand and cope with her children and their individual needs and problems.
Another very important point brought out from teachers' comments is the fact that more children demonstrate real interest and enthusiasm for reading which was not generally seen before. Students of the reading process know that the mental attitude children have toward reading or for that matter anything they are doing, will affect their progress to a great degree. Therefore, it is this kind of an outcome or result which should prove very significant.

Many other comments were made by these teachers with varying degrees of significance. One teacher remarked that because the children enjoy reading and writing so much, they kept very busy during free time and she found she had to cope with fewer discipline problems than previously. Another teacher, in her second year of teaching i/t/a in kindergarten, said that the children learning to read during her first year did much better, as a whole, than those in her second year. It is this kind of comment which is causing so many questions to be raised about the actual validity of the i/t/a testing results. This kind of comment brings into focus the possibility of significant variables not taken into consideration in the testing program. Did the excitement of the first year's tests cause the results to be slightly higher? Was the teacher less enthusiastic in her teaching during the second year? Just what caused a general lowering of achievement during the second year?

New and unusual activities have been started in some classrooms where i/t/a is being used. In the Hamilton School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, stories and letters written in i/t/a are sent out and exchanged with stories written in i/t/a by children in England. Also in Bethlehem, in the Spring Garden School, stories and poems written by fifth graders have been collected and transliterated and then placed in the library for the first grade children.
to read.  

A great deal of time, money, human effort, and hard work has been expended in setting up these i/t/a experiments. As each new result is made known, many different problems and questions arise only to provide for more research and diligent effort by all concerned. Teachers and researchers in these studies seem quite enthusiastic about the positive possibilities of the Initial Teaching Alphabet, but others, even after knowing all of the facts, still have doubts and questions. How will i/t/a's results compare in the end with results of the basal reading program or with the other approaches to teaching beginning reading? How will i/t/a taught children compare with traditionally taught children in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade? What about the children who transfer in or out of an i/t/a system in the middle of the year? These are questions which only time and trial can answer.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER FOUR

1 Downing, John, "Teaching Reading with the Initial Teaching Alphabet in Britain," Education Digest (XV, September, 1964), p. 44.


4 Ibid.


CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In our modern scientific society, it is doubtful that any educated person could argue against the importance and value of knowing how to read. From the beginning of the twentieth century there has been a growing surge of interest in the processes involved in reading. Within the last fifty years, the "golden period" in reading development, more research has been carried out and new ideas about these processes have been developed than ever before. From the earliest controversies between emphasis on silent reading techniques versus oral techniques, to the addition of scientific research studies, emphasis on reading readiness and the birth of the "atomic age," there has been an ever-growing realization of the complexity contained in the reading act.

Many educators are currently much concerned about one particular phase of reading and that is how and why a child first learns to read. How does he actually learn that there is a relationship between what he sees written or printed on paper and the objects in his environment or the ideas he wants to convey to others? Just what aids him in understanding that the speech he hears and attaches meaning to can also be represented in print? As these questions are being answered through testing and research studies, new ones, perhaps even more significant, arise. What method or process provides the most help to children in unlocking the relationships between sound, print and meaning? How can teachers best motivate children to learn to read?
Different answers to these questions have flashed across the educational screen during the last few years, each with its own view of the problem. Some have proved very significant, in fact most new ideas work well with some people or in some situations. However, there has yet to be introduced a means or method of teaching reading which has been proved to be effective one hundred percent of the time.

Of all the approaches to teaching beginning reading, probably the most recent and spectacular development is the Initial Teaching Alphabet, originated by Sir James Pitman in England. Mr. Pitman's idea was a simple one. He thought that by eliminating confusion and making initial stages of learning to read easier for children, their progress would be more rapid and their failures fewer in number. Since there were similar studies in the 1800's, the idea of an augmented alphabet did not originate with Mr. Pitman, but he was the first to perfect it and set up scientific studies pertaining to its effectiveness.

Mr. Pitman completed his Augmented Roman Alphabet, as it was originally called, in the summer of 1960 and took it to London to begin research studies. With help from the Institute of Education at the University of London, certain changes were made including changing its name to the Initial Teaching Alphabet and soon studies were underway. News of the success of this alphabet spread to the United States and by 1963 a pilot demonstration was set up in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, with Dr. Albert Mazurkiewicz of Lehigh University as its director. A project as dynamic and unusual as this one could not be kept secret and before long educators began to show an interest in it and more studies began in other parts of the country. The
Initial Teaching Alphabet has not only been demonstrated in the first grade with beginning reading, but also in some pre-school classes, in kindergartens, with remedial reading groups, and in some classes of mentally handicapped children.

Initial results from Britain seem to suggest that there is definite value in the use of the Initial Teaching Alphabet. The i/t/a taught children seem to receive better scores on standardized tests in the areas of word recognition, reading speed and comprehension, and spelling. However, there is the ever-present question of the actual validity of these results. How can the researchers be absolutely sure that their results were not altered because of some unseen and unexpected variable not accounted for in their scientific approach to evaluation?

Whenever people are being dealt with, even if they are children, their uniqueness must be met and evaluated. In these studies of the Initial Teaching Alphabet, real children and teachers are being studied and therefore, no matter what means or method is used, there is still the possibility of invalid results merely because of the people involved. The only way for any definite predictions and conclusions to be made about i/t/a, as with any such idea, is continued research in study after study with as many different kinds of people and environments as possible being tested. The results from the first few years can only indicate to the people involved that the Initial Teaching Alphabet is seemingly worthwhile enough to merit the expense and effort of further research. In addition to this, these initial results from various kinds of studies being conducted may be able to suggest one particular area or phase
of reading in which i/t/a will have the greatest effect. For example, after further research of i/t/a's possibilities, the results may indicate that its greatest effectiveness would be in the area of remedial reading or perhaps teaching reading to the mentally handicapped children. On the other hand, these same future results may show that the i/t/a taught child or adult is a significantly superior reader and it would be to all children's advantage to learn to read using this medium.

However, these conclusions rest in the future. The only valid conclusion which can be suggested at the present time concerning the value of the Initial Teaching Alphabet as a means of teaching beginning reading is that thus far the results seem positive and that they indicate a necessity for more research, more studies, and more questions. Longitudinal studies, following the i/t/a taught children and the traditionally taught children must be completed and comparisons made at higher grade levels. A final area which must be explored is the influence of i/t/a on children's attitudes toward reading, writing and learning in general. A child's self-concept in relation to these tasks is an all-important factor in his success or failure.

None of the data collected to this date is substantial enough to warrant the extravagant claims which are presently being made. The Initial Teaching Alphabet is certainly not a bandwagon to reading success on which everyone can catch a free ride. The process of learning to read is still a difficult and complicated one and only broad, future results yielding scientifically reliable conclusions can determine i/t/a's permanent place in the teaching of reading.
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Mazurkiewicz, Albert. Second Year Evaluation, Lehigh-Bethlehem i/t/a Study.

SPEECH

APPENDIX
The new alphabet: It has 14 yoids instead of the familiar 9.
Appendix B
1. Name: ____________________________

2. Address: ____________________________

3. School and grade: ____________________________

4. Grade you teach:
   1. Pre-School
   2. Kindergarten
   3. First Grade
   4. Second Grade
   5. Other

5. How long have you taught?
   1. 1-3 years
   2. 4-6 years
   3. 7-10 years
   4. More than 10 years

6. How long have you used T/T?
   1. 0-6 months
   2. 7-12 months
   3. 13-18 months
   4. More than 18 months

7. What were your first reactions to the use of a phonemic approach in teaching children to read?
   1. Hesitation and doubt
   2. Superficial and confidence
   3. Complete antipathy until seen used
   4. Other

8. Did you participate in a training program in the use of T/T?
   1. Yes
   2. No

9. If so, what type of training did you receive?
   1. Observation and in-service
   2. Workshop
   3. Other
   4. Both 1 and 2

10. Do you feel that your training was adequate?
    1. Yes
    2. No

11. What if any particular difficulties do you have using T/T?
    1. Tendency to slip back into I/D.


3. Difficult in teaching due to the lack of available materials in i/t/a.

4. Presenting the idea of phoneme or sound symbol to the children.

5. Other

How did the majority of children receive this "new" alphabet?

1. 2. With enthusiasm and interest.

2. With hesitation due to its strangeness.

3. With anxiety.

4. Other.

4. How do you find the evaluation of student progress in i/t/a?

1. More difficult.

2. Easier than in T.O.

3. Difficult to compare with evaluation in T.O.

4. Other.

4. After having used both T.O. and i/t/a to teach children to read, which do you prefer?

1. T.O.

2. i/t/a.

3. WHY?

5. Please feel free to use the rest of the space available to comment on any phase of the i/t/a program. (Ex. personal reactions or experiences, possible success, educational significance, etc.)
Appendix C
Comparison of Spelling Test Scores

Table I.

T. O. Spelling Test (September, 1961, Entrants)
Schonell's Graded Word Spelling Test A.

OVER-ALL COMPARISON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>i/t/a Group (N. 318)</th>
<th>t/o Group (N. 602)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEAN</strong></td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S.D.</strong></td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>t - 4.34. sig. at 0.1% level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Downing, John, "The i/t/a Reading Experiment in Britain," Improvement of Reading Through Classroom Practices, p.265.
Appendix D

WORD RECOGNITION LEVELS IN SUB-SAMPLE
(middle to upper socio-economic)

Table II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botel Inv. Inst. Level</th>
<th>i/t/a Pop. N=78</th>
<th>t/o Pop. N=58</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7 (9%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP and below</td>
<td>7 (9%)</td>
<td>21 (36.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix E

CALIFORNIA READING TEST
(LOWER PRIMARY)

Table III.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Grade Equivalent (Total Reading Scores)</th>
<th>i/t/a N - 115 PERCENTAGE</th>
<th>t/o N - 114 PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0+</td>
<td>1.570</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 - 3.9</td>
<td>4.070</td>
<td>2.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0 - 3.4</td>
<td>24.070</td>
<td>8.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 - 2.9</td>
<td>37.075</td>
<td>28.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0 - 2.4</td>
<td>24.070</td>
<td>27.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 - 1.9</td>
<td>9.070</td>
<td>21.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0 - 1.4</td>
<td>- - - -</td>
<td>11.670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mazurkiewicz, Albert, i/t/a Report, p. 12
Appendix F

READING ACHIEVEMENTS

Table IV.

Reading Achievements of Matched Samples in May and September, 1964

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>i/t/a</th>
<th>t/o</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N-114</td>
<td>N-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.57%</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5-3.9</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>10.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0-3.4</td>
<td>24.07</td>
<td>21.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5-2.9</td>
<td>37.08</td>
<td>35.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0-2.4</td>
<td>24.07</td>
<td>22.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5-1.9</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>8.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0-1.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mazurkiewicz, Albert, Second Year Evaluation, p. 3.