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A STUDY OF  
THE INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET

AN ABSTRACT OF  
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The Initial Teaching Alphabet is based on the concept that beginning readers can best start learning to read by deciphering a simple systematic code. After they have learned to use this simple code, they can then learn the more complex code of traditional orthography and spelling. Sir Isaac Pitman, who lived from 1813 to 1897, was one of the early pioneers in the field of using a simple code to teach beginning reading. Many successful experiments were carried out in the United States and England in the nineteenth century using phonetic alphabets to teach beginning reading.

In 1959 Sir James Pitman, a grandson of Sir Isaac Pitman, invented the Initial Teaching Alphabet. Albert J. Mazurkiewicz and Harold J. Tanyzer made one addition to the letters of the alphabet and wrote a series of textbooks for use in the United States. This alphabet is a tool to teach beginning reading. It consists of forty-four symbols, each representing a single sound, and includes every sound in the English language. The spelling is based on the transcription of vocabulary into speech sounds. The reader can spell and sound out words simultaneously. It is a logical systematic tool to identify the printed word with the spoken word. The visual pattern is kept uniform by using larger size lower case letters for capital letters. Where possible traditional spelling is kept

so there is a relationship between the Initial Teaching Alphabet and traditional orthography.

The Initial Teaching Alphabet can be used in all areas of the language arts in the first grade. Since its forty-four characters comprise all the sounds of the English language, the children can sound out and write any word in the language. The children are free to write creatively and express themselves independently. They do not have to depend upon the teacher when they write. Reading material can be written on any subject. The vocabulary in the reading material is not limited. The material can be written on topics of interest to the child and is not limited by a prescribed vocabulary.

When the child has reached a third grade reading level, he is ready to make the transition to traditional orthography. The transition to traditional orthography is involved with the spelling patterns. The relationship between the phonemes of the Initial Teaching Alphabet and the spelling patterns of traditional spelling are developed. The regular and irregular traditional spelling patterns are taught in terms of the sound phonemes the child knows. The child does not change immediately from one complete alphabet to the other. He gradually drops the Initial Teaching Alphabet as he learns the traditional one.

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Although originally created to teach beginning reading, it is now used in other reading areas as well. It has been used with children who have not been successful in learning to read traditional orthography and need remedial reading. It has been used to teach reading to atypical children who have special problems. In all reading areas the Initial Teaching Alphabet has been reported to be the equivalent to, or superior to, the traditional orthography.