

ITA: a critic

Dear Sir:

The article on ITA (SN:2/11) and the following letters, have failed to mention the most challenging question raised by ITA: how should it be taught, by the sight or the phonics method?

The original ITA manuals published in England tell the teacher she is free to use either method. Most English teachers have chosen to use the sight, or whole-word, method first. The children memorize undifferentiated word wholes and then are led to discover the sound values of the letters, a process that takes two or three years. This is essentially the same method used in the United States with the traditional alphabet.

In the United States, however, ITA is not being taught by the sight method. It is being taught by a phonics method. At the beginning of first grade, the children are told the sound value of the ITA symbols, and are taught to put these sounds together to build words. All of the symbols are taught within a short period of time.

In the United States where tests have been conducted, ITA, taught by the phonics method, has been compared with the traditional alphabet, taught by the sight method. In these tests, ITA invariably comes out on top. This indicates ITA, taught by the phonics method, is superior to the traditional alphabet, taught by the sight method.

Does this mean ITA is superior to the traditional alphabet when it is taught by the phonics method? Not at all. Children taught to sound out words in the traditional alphabet learn to read every bit as well as children taught by ITA; furthermore, there is no transition problem.

The greatest value of ITA is that it teaches the teachers what children must go through in order to use an alphabetically written language. The teachers, to use the medium, must translate speech sound to printed symbol, and printed symbol to speech sound, just as all beginning readers must do. This gives them an empathy with the children's learning problems they have never had before.

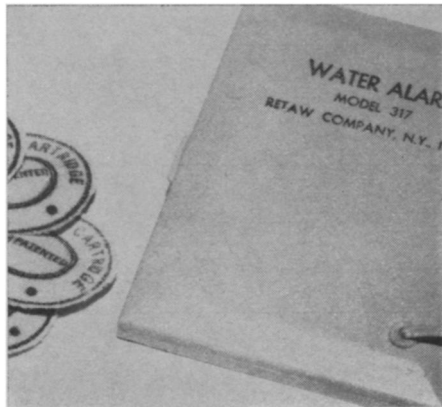
ITA for teachers, yes. ITA for remedial work, yes. ITA for beginning readers, no. It is expensive and is not necessary.

Claire Thomas
Bellevue, Wis.

(The issue of phonics versus word recognition in teaching beginning reading itself remains largely unresolved.)

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