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Editorial Comment

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Teachers seek enthusiastically for materials and methods which can be used effectively in the classroom. Almost any device or procedure which is reported to be “new” is frequently accepted without a careful evaluation of the facts both pro and con. Phonetics, individualized instruction, means of grouping, mechanized equipment and unique alphabet reading programs are regarded by some teachers as “cure-alls” in their field.

In the practice of medicine, the physician considers the placebo effect of any treatment. The Latin term *placebo* means I shall please. With many patients and to some extent with all, any harmless substance or bread pill can be given to satisfy the individual's demand for medicine or attention. Is it not possible that teachers of reading should also consider the placebo effect of their methods and materials? Critical consideration should be given to the exaggerated values attributed to any teaching scheme. How much of the instruction actually results in changes due to the intrinsic value of treatment, and how much change is due to suggestion which is psychological in nature? Is not the value of any method or material dependent upon the effectiveness and personality of the teacher who uses them? Generally, indoctrination and suggestion are critical factors in any classroom. Placebo effects can be both beneficial and detrimental. Both extremes should be considered and carefully evaluated for it behooves each teacher to examine critically his cherished beliefs rather than merely stand ready to defend them.

Homer L. J. Carter
Editor