MANY teachers have sighed despairingly over the poor reader and have asked with a note of weariness in their voices "Are the poor readers here to stay?" for they, like the other "poors" seem to be always with us. The reading problem is so universal that the research in that field is overwhelming. And yet, in spite of all the excellent work that has been done, we still have the group of persistent non-readers who show every evidence of having the capacity to learn to read, but who, for some reason or another, do not engage in the active participation that is necessary to bring forth sound and meaning from printed symbols. No one can effect constructive change in another person without the active participation of that person and his desire to change. To create in the individual a desire to change, and to secure the active participation necessary to accomplish the change, is sometimes a very real problem. If a pupil has the capacity to learn to read but is not utilizing that capacity, what can the teacher do to release it?

There have been many attacks upon this problem. It has been recognized for a long time that children do not learn to read until they have built up "reading readiness." Just what do we mean by "reading readiness?"

Classroom experience, research, and the evaluation of both have stressed certain factors that are considered necessary for successful reading progress: the mental age of the child, his social and emotional maturity, experiences that give meaning to vocabulary, adequate skills to enable the child to translate the printed symbols into meaningful words. Certain physical conditions are also important. The child's vision, hearing, and speech are significant factors. Research studies have indicated many influences that seem to enter into the reading problem: handedness, sex, family background, health, nutrition, and others. The schools have earnestly attacked this problem and have contributed to a wealth of material that has increased our understanding. However, we still do not have an adequate solution.

To give the children experiences that can develop their vocabularies, and to give real meaning to reading by using many experience stories, are successful methods. But even these fail to teach some children to read. The use of many very easy books to give the child a feeling of success in his early attempts to read has been tried successfully. To wait until the child indicates that he is ready, that he wants to learn to read; and deliberately to avoid any pressure, so that the child remains relaxed and voluntarily seeks to acquire this skill when he feels a need for it, have also been used successfully. But these, too, have failed with some.

The kinesthetic approach, the phonetic approach, the nonsense-syllable approach, the whole-story approach, the silent approach—there are too many to enumerate them all—give the same re-
suits: successful in many cases, useless in others. These varied methods have one characteristic in common: the motivation of the teacher. These techniques are direct approaches. The objective is always clear enough in the mind of the teacher. She wants to teach reading, and every one of these devices is pointed directly down the road that says READING in big letters at the end.

Then, there are those exceptions at both extremes that throw a monkey-wrench into the best laid plans of the educators. For example, Mary is very bright, gets along well with the other children, seems quite mature emotionally (she is quiet and well-mannered), has excellent health, good care, a devoted family, excellent vision, hearing, speech, superior vocabulary, and multiple experiences that she can relate with vividness. But Mary cannot read; she blocks completely every time the small reading group assembles. And in the same class is Audrey, below normal mentally, undernourished, severe speech defect, fifty per cent vision, meagre experiences, poor health (she has a cold practically all winter), and yet Audrey can read anything she picks up and can relate it accurately to others. Exceptions, yes. But why?

This article is an attempt to describe briefly an experience with a group of thirty-seven second graders who were poor readers or nonreaders. It was a study that the teacher made in an attempt to determine what results could be obtained by a therapeutic approach, with the objective first of all a better adjustment of the children; happier children, relaxed, unhurried, natural children in the kind of situation that would free the capacities within each one, that would help the children gain a better understanding of themselves and so become better able to help themselves. The procedure is based upon the philosophy that is the foundation of nondirective psychotherapy. The application of this philosophy for the field of education presents a real challenge, and the attendant results seem worthy of more intensive study and research.

The basic philosophy is built upon one central value: a deep respect for the integrity of the individual and a belief in the capacity of an individual to help himself when that capacity is given optimum release. It is a respect that grants the individual the right-of-way to utilize the capacities within himself. It is a respect that implies that the individual has reasons for what he does, that he knows what he is doing, that he is best able to know how he feels and what he wants and why he feels the way he does. It is a respect for the inner self, rather than a "social respect." One might respect an individual for his ability to memorize facts better than anyone else, or to play a better ball game, or to play a musical instrument unusually well. That is respect for an accomplishment, for having obtained a commendable goal, for being able to do something better, and all of this rates high in a competitive frame of reference. In the nondirective philosophy the words "respect for the individual" are used to convey a recognition of the individuality of all men, and a belief that man is entitled to the right to develop to his fullest capacities. It implies that each man is different, that each one proceeds at his own pace, that each one operates within his limitations of one kind or another, but is never exploited for another's gain. This places the focus on the individual, measured against himself and not against others. We are concerned then with matching the inner capacities of the individual with the realization of those capacities in the world of reality. We accept the individual exactly as he is. The individu-
al's behavior tells us a little about him, but there is a much greater part of the individual's inner life that only he knows; for try as we will we cannot penetrate the inner recesses of that self without the active and voluntary participation of the individual.

When we secure the confidence and trust of a little child and he shares his inner world with us, then we are impressed by the child's ability to cope with very serious problems. When the teacher is taken into the confidence of Billy and Mary and Dick, and hears snatches of the feelings and experiences that are a part of their lives, these children are no longer "problem children" to her. They are children who have reasons for being as they are. The teacher sometimes asks herself if she could do as well under similar circumstances. And so the teacher extends her complete acceptance to all the children, granting them all this understanding. She tries to give them the opportunity and the permissiveness to be themselves in her classroom, to get their feelings and attitudes out in the open, to learn to know themselves, to release their tensions, and thus to clear the way for more positive and constructive growth.

In this class experiment it was the purpose of the teacher to provide the kind of experiences for these children that would be primarily therapeutic, since she believed that this basic philosophy of respect for the child, is a necessary prerequisite for any kind of functional learning. Therefore, the class program was designed to give the children ample expression thru the mediums of art materials, play materials, free dramatics, puppet plays, music, creative writing (dictating their own stories), telling stories they made up themselves, planning for themselves, listening to stories, taking trips, sharing experiences, keeping the bulletin board up to date and alive, and living together in an atmosphere of complete acceptance. In this framework their feelings and attitudes were not only accepted but clarified for them by an understanding teacher, and their ability to think for themselves and do for themselves was utilized as fully as possible. In the reading groups (there were four of them), they dictated their own stories, read them back, listened to stories, and read easy books. But the children were never compelled to join a reading group; they came to the group voluntarily. When they discovered, after testing the real permissiveness of the teacher's attitude in this regard, that she meant what she said and that the children only came into the group if they wanted to come, then they came. When they came, they were active participants, and willing to learn.

There were thirty-seven children in this group, eight girls and twenty-nine boys. Eight of the children were left-handed. Four of the children had serious eye difficulty. Eleven had speech defects. The intelligence quotients varied from 80 to 148 according to Stanford-Binet tests. The children came from average homes. There were five colored children in the selected group.

During the last two weeks of the first semester, the second grade teachers were asked to list the names of the pupils in their classes who, in their opinion, were seriously maladjusted in reading. Fifty children were so listed. (There were six classes of second graders in this school, the average class size being 38 per teacher.) The Gray Oral Reading Test was given to each of these children. Because each class had to contain a specified number of children, there were to be thirty-seven children selected for this "remedial reading" class.

The fifty children were then given
the Gates Primary Reading Test and the thirty-seven who received the lowest scores were placed in this class. Unlike most remedial reading classes, these children were to have all their school work in one room with the same teacher, since these children's reading problems were considered to be a part of the whole child.

Observers visited the class once a week to record the behavior of the children. The teacher took brief notes of some of her talks with the children. Excerpts from the notes of the recorders thrown an interesting light upon the emotional problems of the poor readers. These thumb-nail sketches indicated a need for something more important than reading skills for these children. They are random samples, not just the extreme cases.

Dick was a thin, hollow-eyed boy, almost nine and still in the second grade. He stayed on the outer edge of the group. He watched the others, said very little to anyone, and drifted around the room leaving behind him a trail of unfinished work. When, for a moment on rare occasions, he joined in the activities of the group there was soon a flare-up of trouble because Dick had moments of displaying a violent temper. He bit the other children, hit them, kicked them, shoved them. He was bigger than they. And just as quickly as it flared up, it died down, and he cried out his remorse, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!"

Dick played truant quite often. When he did his truancy was followed by reports from other children on the way to and from school, from neighbors, store-keepers, and the police. Dick stole, set fires, and committed acts of vandalism. Dick was not at all interested in reading, or in any other school work.

One day, during the children's "work period" Dick decided to paint. The teacher sat down beside him, smiled at him. Dick looked at her with a sad expression in his eyes. He was slopping black paint over his paper. Then suddenly he said to her, "Know what? I'm a bastard—just a dirty bastard and I ain't got no father and I never did have. My stepfather told me he wished I'd never been born. You know what a bastard is, don't you?"

"Yes," said the teacher. "I know. And it makes you unhappy when you think about it—and when your step-father talks to you like that." (Yes, the teacher did know he was illegitimate, but she didn't think Dick knew it yet.)

"I've got a sister," said Dick, and there was a note of pride in his voice. "She's pretty, like a doll. She's three. She's taking dancing lessons." He smiled briefly, then suddenly glowered, "I hate her," he said. "I hate her. She gets everything. They love her."

"She's a pretty little sister—and kind of nice, but sometimes you hate her because she gets things and you don't—and you think they love her better than they do you."

"Yeah!" Dick said. He smeared the paper vigorously. He stabbed it with his brush. Then he looked at the teacher again with a brief smile. "She's got yellow-curls all over her head," he said, "bright as the sun." He paused momentarily. "She's so sweet," he said. His smile changed again to a glower. "Someday, I'll get the scissors and cut them off!" he said. "I'll take the scissors and cut her throat. Then they'll feel bad."

"You think she's a sweet little girl—and pretty—but sometimes you feel like hurting her to get back at your mother and step-father because of the way they treat you, hm?"

"Yeah," Dick answered soberly. "I wouldn't just hurt her, I'd kill her and get rid of her so they wouldn't have her."

"Oh," said the teacher. "You mean you would kill her just to take her away from your parents."

"Yeah," Dick answered, glumly. He placed his other hand down on the wet black paint and smeared it around. "I wouldn't though," he said quietly. "I wouldn't hurt her. Not really. She's the only one at home who likes me. She runs out to meet me. I take good care of her. If anybody ever hurts her, why I fight them until they bleed."

"Then you really think a lot of your little sister and she thinks a lot of you—and you wouldn't hurt her or let any one else hurt her—"

"I'll say I wouldn't. It's my step-father I really hate."

There the teacher had a brief glimpse into Dick's inner thoughts. And there were many other times when the teacher sat down beside Dick and talked to him in this manner. Dick had a very real problem and he was not interested in reading, writing, or anything else.
First of all he must find some release for these tensions and feelings of conflict. First of all he must feel accepted.

In this type of teacher-pupil relationship, where the children feel free to express their true feelings, where they feel that the teacher understands them, accepts them exactly as they are, and respects them, then they share with her their innermost world. The following very brief excerpts indicate the kinds of thoughts some of these children lived with. The teacher was never too busy to listen. The children came first. The reading, writing, and arithmetic came secondly.

Bill was busily hammering nails in a board. He was muttering to himself when the teacher stopped beside him. He looked up and there were tears in his eyes.

"Something the matter, Bill?" she asked.

"No," he said, with a quivering lip. Then quickly he changed his answer. "Yes," he said. The teacher waited.

"Becky is having a birthday party and she says I can't come," he said woefully.

"Oh," said the teacher. "It made you feel unhappy when she told you you couldn't come." (When a fellow is seven a birthday party is an important event.)

"No," Bill protested vigorously. "I don't wanta go to her old party. I wouldn't ever go. I don't ever wanta go to anybody's party."

"I see," said the teacher. "Then it's not because you weren't invited to the party that you feel so sad."

"No," said Bill, wiping his nose on his sleeve. Then hammering vigorously on the nails, "She said it was because I was a nigger," he said, with a catch in his voice, but thrusting out his chin, as he spoke. "But I'm not a nigger," he cried. "I'm not a nigger." The tears rolled down his cheeks. His eyes beseeched the teacher. "Am I?" he asked her. "Am I—a nigger?"

"It made you feel very unhappy when she called you that, didn't it, Bill?"

"I'm not a nigger," Bill said again. "Am I? Am I?"

"You're not a nigger. You're Bill," said the teacher. She looked at his blue eyes, his light brown skin, his brown curly hair. She thought of the little black clip that was attached to Bill's permanent record card. Here was Bill, meeting for the first time the race problem that would probably be like a shadow to him all the rest of his life.

"I don't care if she didn't ask me to her old party," he said.

"You really don't care about the party," the teacher said.

"Yes, I do," Bill said. "Yes, I do; I do care."

"You would like to go if you could, Bill," said the teacher. "I understand. You're unhappy when you're left out."

"Maybe someday I'll have a party and I won't ask her," he said.

"You would like to get even with her some day, maybe, hm?"

"Yes," said Bill. The tears stopped. He began to make an airplane—"Look," he said, "this is going to be a B-29." And Bill seemed to have weathered the storm.

Jenny had the habit of continually sucking her two middle fingers. She had driven her former teacher almost frantic with this habit. She was timid, cried easily, stood around doing nothing but suck her fingers. One day she came in with her fingers bandaged. She chewed at the bandages nervously. When the teacher sat down beside her she thrust her bandaged finger out toward her.

"Something happen to your fingers?" asked the teacher.

Jenny nodded and returned them to her mouth. The teacher waited. If Jenny wanted to tell her she would.

"Daddy did it," she said.

"Oh?" said the teacher. "Your daddy?"

"With a butcher knife," she said, and her words came out with a rush. "He said if I sucked them again he'd cut them off and I did and I couldn't help it. I couldn't help it and he did. He got the butcher knife and he cut them almost off and they bled and I was afraid and I cried and he shut me down in the cellar and I'm so afraid of the cellar. There are rats down there." There was panic once more in Jenny's eyes.

"You really were scared, weren't you, to have your Daddy cut your fingers and then shut you down in the cellar because you cried?"

"Yes," Jenny said. "There are rats down there."

"The rats down in the cellar frighten you, too."
“Yes - yes - ” Jenny said. And once more the bandaged fingers were in her mouth.

“Mama said the next time my fingers would probably be cut clear off,” Jenny said.

“They really are scaring you, aren’t they?” said the teacher. (What the teacher thought at this point must for the sake of propriety be censored.)

And Donald, one day, colored a picture taking infinite pains seemingly to achieve perfection. The teacher stopped beside Donald.

“Every tiny line just right,” he said, peering at it through his glasses. “Oh! what’ll I do?”

“You want it to be just perfect, hm?”

Donald looked up at the teacher.

“My mother does,” he said with considerable feeling in his voice. “I gotta take every paper I do home and let her see it. I gotta always be inside the lines. But I’d like to smear it all up!”

“Mother likes them perfect, hm? but you would like to smear this one all up,” said the teacher.

Donald looked at the teacher and a mischievous smile flitted across his face.

“Do you care?” he asked.

“No,” said the teacher. “I don’t care. That is your picture. You do as you like about it.”

“Ha!” said Donald—and he snatched up his black crayon and really messed it up. He laughed gaily.

“You enjoyed messing that one up, didn’t you?” said the teacher.

“Yes,” he said. He snatched up the picture, held it at arm’s length, gave a wonderful imitation of his mother.

“Now let me see! Oh Donald! Donald! Did you do this? Oh, I am so ashamed of you! Oh, what will I do?”

“Think mother will be upset, hm?”

“Oh yes,” said Donald quite happily. “Yes,” he sighed. “If she sees it. But there isn’t any reason why she should see it.” He got up and threw it in the waste basket. “Anyhow, it was fun,” he said. And he got another piece of paper and prepared another picture that “mother would like.”

“It felt good to mess up that one, but you think that you ought to do another good one to take home, hm?”

“Yeah,” said Donald. “She saves all my papers.”

(Yes, thought the teacher, I expect she would. She comes over every week and wants to know why we don’t teach reading here like they did in the good old days when she went to school.)

Ronald B. and Barbara were allergy cases. They were nervous and easily upset at the beginning of the semester. They had been in a class where the teacher was very strict, and where there had been pressure applied to force reading. In this class, as a result of the absence of pressure, and an opportunity to relax and be themselves, the allergy symptoms disappeared, and in these two cases the progress in reading was quite high.

As the teacher checked the list of children who were members of this class she was impressed by the many serious problems that these children were facing.

Orville was the only child of a middle-aged mother and a seventy-year-old father. He talked about his room “where they locked him in” and how he “couldn’t ever make any noise” and how he “wouldn’t dare bring other kids home,” and how his mother “rocked him to sleep at nights.” Orville couldn’t read. He couldn’t do anything but stand around, it seemed. But Orville had an I.Q. of 148 and perfect health and perfect vision. His parents couldn’t understand why he couldn’t read. They really couldn’t! It was not until his mother came over once a week after school to see the teacher for counseling that she began to understand things a little better. Orville gradually became an active member of the group, and began to explore his own possibilities.

The teacher noticed that all of these children had a serious problem of one kind or another. She checked the list in her roll book, and jotted down some of the things the children had talked about during the informal chats:

Nancy—“My mother and father are getting a divorce and I just cry about it. I don’t want my daddy to never come home.”

Bill—“Am I a nigger? Am I?”
Orville—"They lock me in my room at nights. I wouldn't dare bring other kids home. I can't ever make any noise. My mother rocks me to sleep at night."

Jim—"Anybody else ever says I steal and I'll bust 'em. Anybody else call me a nigger—and they'll see!"

Edna—"Did you read in the papers how my father was murdered. Did You? Did you? I'm afraid to go upstairs at night. I'm afraid I'll—Oh, I don't know. My father was killed. They had a fight. And this man stabbed my father with a knife—I'm afraid."

Leonard—"I don't know anything. I'm dumb. My sisters say I'm dumb—I don't wanta do anything."

Arnold—"My mother got a new baby and they don't want me any more."

Malcolm—"I can't go out and play. Mamma said I might catch cold. Mamma said not to sit in a draught. Mamma said not to paint. It won't wash out—Mamma said — "

William—"I can't see it. What did you say? I don't know what you mean? I can't." (Vision less than 50 per cent. Hearing defective.)

Bruce—"Do you know where babies come from? I can tell you—Do you know what's the difference between boys and girls? It's bad — "

Mac—"I didn't have any breakfast. Well—we didn't get up in time. Yeah, this is my winter coat—I hope it don't get too cold—We don't have much heat at home."

Janey — "Mamma has gone away. Daddy says she ain't coming back. He won't let her. Yeah—they're going to get a divorce. I wish she would come back. She said she would — "

Donald—"I gotta always be inside the lines."

Jack—"Oh, I wouldn't dare. My father would beat me. I gotta take a book home. I gotta study."

Blair—"I don't care whether I ever learn to read. My mother says if I don't pass she'll have my dad lick me. Well, I hate reading. I hate hate hate it."

Ronald—"My cousin got all A's on his card. Mother hopes I can be as smart. My uncle is living with us now. He's crazy from the war. Whenever a car backfires he cries like a baby. Mother says we're going to have to get rid of him."

Allen—"Mamma makes me write my numbers to 100 every night. She wants to know when we're going to have spelling lists. She wants to help me be a good speller."

Ann—"Daddy wants me to go back to the Catholic school. Mamma wants me to come here. Daddy wants me to be a Catholic, but Mamma doesn't. Daddy says — "

Arlene—"I don't feel good. I gotta stomach ache. My head hurts. Grandma is at our house now. She's sick in bed. Mamma thinks she's going to die. Do you suppose she will die? What is die?"

Jamey—"Mamma said if my brother started to school next year he would probably get ahead of me because he's smarter than I am. My brother is only five but he can read almost as good as me now. He's smart and I'm dumb."

Jerry—"My mother got a telegram from the War Department. My father's missing. Nobody knows where he is. The Japs probably got him. My mother just cries. He's probably in a Jap prison."

This gives a fair sampling. It seemed to indicate that in many instances the reading problem might have been caused by the child's emotional problem. Other things far more important to the child than reading loomed up on his horizon.

This class experience was built upon as many therapeutic procedures as it was possible to include. Every way of
### TABLE I

**Reading Scores (in Grades) and Improvement (in Months) of the Therapeutic Group in Three and One-Half Months**

(Gates Reading Tests, Grades 1 and 2)

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<td>5.3 1.5</td>
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<td>12. 1.7</td>
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<td>7. Arnold</td>
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Second Binet 112
Speech Defect
Less than 50% Vision
Left-handed
Speech Defect
Second Binet 119
Speech Defect
Second Binet 112
Left-handed
Speech Defect
Second Binet 112
Left-handed
Speech Defect
Left-handed
Poor Vision
Speech Defect
Less than 50% Vision
Left-handed
incorporating the basic therapeutic principles that was thought of and that could find a place in the scheme of things was put into practice. There was ample opportunity to find release of feelings and a means of self-expression in the art work, free play, music and rhythm, puppet shows, group and individual stories that the children dictated, and in free dramas and group interaction. There was no pressure. Everything was on a voluntary basis. The children were respected. They were accepted completely. They were granted the permissiveness to be themselves, to express their real thoughts and feelings, to utilize the capacities within themselves. The children assumed the responsibility for themselves. It was thought that an experience which would help the children gain a better understanding of themselves and a feeling of success and self-confidence and personal worth was a necessary prerequisite for successful academic work.

At the end of the semester, reading and intelligence tests were given again. There were three and a half months between tests. The results of the first and second tests are given in Table I. The gains, given in months, can be compared to the normal expectation of 3.5 months. The results of these tests are interesting in view of the fact that no remedial reading instruction was given, and that the reading class attendance was always on a volunteer basis, although most of the children joined the reading groups regularly. There were over two hundred easy library books in the room which the children loved "to look at." There were many preprimers and primers available for their use.

Jim, Edna, Dick and Jenny were given a series of half-hour individual play therapy contacts once a week after school for a period of eight weeks.

In the cases of four of the children there was a noteworthy difference in the first and second Binet test. These tests were given by the same experienced psychometrician before and after the study.

This study indicates that a nondirective therapeutic approach might be helpful in solving certain "reading problems." It indicates that it would be worthwhile to set up research projects to test this hypothesis further: that nondirective therapeutic procedures applied to children with reading problems are effective not only in bringing about a better personal adjustment, but also in building up a readiness to read.