

Tools for Learning

MAKE BOOKS AVAILABLE

Ruth Ersted

NO ONE TODAY, looking at publishers' announcements or advertisements of books, could deny the wealth of printed materials available for children and young people. There are books of many kinds for all ages—books of information, books of pictures, books of stories—many of them beautifully designed and carefully written with concern for the needs and interests of young readers. While it is unfortunately true that the total book production for use with juveniles also includes titles of little real worth for any child—teachers, librarians, and parents of discriminating tastes still have a considerable number to choose from. Today's major problem is not a question of how many books are available from the publishers, or even what kind of books, but rather how accessible they are to our boys and girls.

We have no accurate means of knowing exactly how many children are without access to books in homes, schools, or libraries; however, we do have sufficient information to be able to hazard a guess at a figure which is not encouraging. Several studies have shown that school libraries supply the largest amount of non-textbook reading done by students of high school age, and that the home and the public library occupy about the same position for second place. Many other sources also provide reading materials—book clubs, churches, and museums, but the amount is negligible in comparison with the above three sources.

By using the figures in "The Equal Chance," a bulletin published by the American Library Association in 1943, we know that only about one person in three (adults and children) has access to a good public library. One-third of the remaining population has no library service, while the other third has service classi-

fied as inadequate by any reasonable standards.

The rapid growth of libraries in schools in the past ten to fifteen years has both improved and increased the number of books available from school libraries. Improved methods of instruction demand the use of many materials to be found in libraries, and yet, according to the latest figures from the U.S. Office of Education, it is doubtful if more than half of the pupils of school age have access to organized school libraries.

To attempt a concise summary of this brief data is somewhat like trying to add two pears and three apples, but it is obvious that the answer is not one of which we have any reason to be proud. In a great democratic nation such as ours, which believes in education to the extent that we do, certainly more than half of the children of school age are entitled to have access to library books and materials.

What are the remedies? Undoubtedly there are many, but there are two which seem of most importance. The further establishment and development of school libraries is the first essential; at present we have almost no organized library service in the elementary schools. The second is the improvement of teacher-training programs to the extent that today's teachers will have a broad knowledge of books for boys and girls and a better idea of how to make use of these books in their classroom teaching.

The January issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP will deal entirely with materials of instruction. Tools for Learning will reappear in February with the theme "Creative Experiences for Children" introduced by William Vitarelli, educational director of Allendale School, Lake Villa, Illinois.

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