

ADULT EDUCATION AND THE LIBRARY

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The term adult education as we now use it was conceived twenty-five years ago in the period following the European War to name the movement for post-school education which grew out of a need for adjustment to a changing world. Now another war has brought even greater changes and a far greater impetus to this movement. The library is the logical agency for leadership in this field since it is the depository of the means for self-education.

Education denotes acquisition of learning by an individual, enabling him to develop his various abilities and interests and by that process preparing himself for a more intelligent participation in affairs. Through such a process he fits himself to play an active part in a democratic society. The change which we are now undergoing from a simpler pattern into the complexity of a world not yet made one but fast moving that way outreaches education and demands continuance of learning beyond school years.

The public library (and for that matter all libraries), as James Truslow Adams points out in his *Frontiers of American Culture*, has a particularly great opportunity in the field of adult education. Libraries are open to all the public in a real sense. The librarian's opportunity is greater when taken in the light of Alvin Johnson's opinion that adult education "cannot thrive under compulsion and rewards" since the adult need is not for a teacher but a "leader." Here is an opportunity for a librarian to lead as never before, to emerge from his seclusion as book selector, lender, or keeper, into group leadership. Johnson calls attention to the need for "group activity" as a part of educational activity. Group education has been

sponsored for many years by women's clubs who have furnished a great impetus to adult education.

The librarian's part in adult education is compulsory at this time, having been pushed on us by the national and international crisis. There will be a greater number of men and women returning from the armed services to civilian life than at any other time, from ten to eleven million from military service along with the reshuffling of some twenty-one million who will be going from war essential work into peace-time living. Every person will have his own problem of adjustment. Some of these problems are not solved by learning to *do* but by learning to *think*.

Mr. Ulveling in his "Large Public Library" in the *A. L. A. Bulletin* of December 1, 1944, suggests three things which are basic in adult education: First, we "must build activities entirely around the idea of serving human needs." Second, we "must forsake our time-honored neutrality on every subject and take a positive position on those issues that threaten our society." Third, we "must find the resources for this program within our present organization." We can't wait to rebuild our staffs and we can't wait to increase our book funds. The job is now and it must be done even though the essentials of books and staff must be built along with our services. We must take advantage of all the aids for which services may be geared. Long years of providing materials for club programs now provide experience for greater usefulness of service to all economic, social, and political groups of the community. Any limited survey of the number and types of agencies within a community is enough to show the public library its opportunity to reach many groups. It has been a heartening example of cooperation to have these community groups come

into being in defense against the threat to security during the war. They should stick together for continued cooperation in reconstruction years. To what extent are we using community cooperative groups already? Here we have a nucleus for our forums.

Service to the returning veteran is perhaps the most urgent and practical need. The library should be ready for him: to assist one to return to his former position; to adjust one to the change he wishes to make; to help one train himself who has never been employed; to aid one who is physically handicapped; to direct one to recreational reading. We must not only have the books and other materials ready for the user, but, much more important, we must have someone who can help bring the man and the book together. This service does not stop with the person who chances to come into a library building.