

Children's Services In Indiana Public Libraries

Barbara Kasper

Children's services is often an area overlooked when state or national studies of public library services are conducted. Lacking either significant quantitative or qualitative studies on a state or national level, it is difficult to evaluate and plan for children's services. The growing awareness within the profession of a need for accountability and measurement emphasizes the intrinsic value of such studies. According to the Public Library Mission Statement, "Library service must be measured by its outputs or services rendered. . .and library systems (must) conduct a continuous assessment of community needs and continuous evaluation of the degree to which the library meets these needs."¹

Elizabeth Gross directed one of the few national studies available in the area of children's services in public libraries.² Conducted

Barbara Kasper, former director of the Delphi Public Library, is presently Library Consultant at the Indiana State Library, and doctoral candidate at the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science.

under the auspices of the American Library Association and based on information gathered in the late fifties, the Gross study primarily examined the organization and administration of children's services. The United States Office of Education began gathering public library data during the seventies (*Survey of Public Libraries, LIBGIS*), but thus far data on children's services has not been included.³ The Indiana State Library annually collects public library statistics which include data on children's services.⁴

On November 15, 1979, a descriptive survey, "Questionnaire - Children's Services in Public Libraries," was mailed to all 239 Indiana public libraries; it requested information relating to input and output services in each library system for the previous year. This survey was part of an investigation of children's services in public libraries which I conducted while at the School of Library and Information Science, Indiana University. By April 1980, a total of 209 surveys had been returned. The population divisions were made in accord with those defined by the Indiana Library Certification Board.⁵ (See Table I)

Question 8 of the "Questionnaire-Children's Services in Public Libraries" requested the librarian to check which of the following services were available to children in the children's department: book talk programs, audio visual listening areas, handicraft activities, book lists, puppet shows, exhibits and displays, radio/television programs, reading aloud, preschool storyhour programs, reference service, other storyhour programs, 16mm film programs, and summer reading activities. Libraries were also asked to list other services available.

The 14 items listed asked only "yes" (the library offers the service) or "no" (the library does not offer the service). The majority of libraries listing other services answered that they had "dial a story." These 14 items were designated for measurement as library output services for children in this study. (See Table II)

Indiana is divided into 92 counties served by 239 public libraries. The unit measurement of community needs is defined as the county. A frequency analysis of the percentage of people served by public libraries (1978) showed a mean (85%), a median (99%), and a mode (100%) with 52 counties having total library service (56.5%). When the total population is compared to the total population served by public libraries only 8% are unserved.⁶

This analysis does not consider the individual library, nor does it attempt to measure the performance level of any specific output service. An indepth analysis of each specific output service would be recommended for future consideration and might include the frequency and attendance of each service in a comparison with the use of library resources and community needs.

What kinds of public library services are available to a child living in Indiana? The data was analyzed through the computer center at Indiana University utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) descriptive statistics for aggregated data files in addition to the Pearson product moment correlation.

It is possible for a child living in Indiana to have access to almost all of the output services considered in this study. Summer reading programs are available in 78 percent of the 239 libraries and in 89 percent of the counties. If a child lives in an unserved area, it is still possible to find a majority of services available within most counties. For example, ten of the services listed in Table II are available in over half of the counties. The unserved library population statewide is 8 percent. On a statewide basis children make up 33 percent of the population. If these percentages are taken one step further, the percent of the population age 0-13 unserved by public libraries is only 02.4 percent. Using the factors of this analysis, Indiana children appear to be well served by the state's public libraries.

Some affirmations can be drawn from this study. Hopefully this introductory analysis can serve as a catalyst for further research in children's services. This study clearly demonstrates that a variety of children's services are available in Indiana, and that the quantity of statewide children's services is high.

TABLE I
QUESTIONNAIRE MAILING

Library Category	Population Served	Number of Libraries		Percent of Return Rate
		Mailed	Returned	
I	Over 150,000	06	06	100%
II	25,001 to 150,000	28	24	86
III	10,001 to 25,000	48	43	90
IV	5,001 to 10,000	50	46	92
V	5,000 or less	107	90	84
TOTAL		239	209	87%

TABLE II
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Output Services (Ranked by Library)	Percent of libraries Offering Service	
	By Library N=239	By County N=92
Summer reading programs	78%	89%
Reference service	72	87
Pre-school storyhour programs	63	85
Exhibits & displays	62	83
16mm film programs	48	76
Other storyhour programs	48	73
Handicraft activities	43	70
Book lists	39	67
Puppet shows	37	65
Book talk programs	29	51
Reading aloud	23	41
Audio visual listening areas	20	43
Other services	13	30
Radio/television programs	03	09

Notes

- ¹ American Library Association, Public Library Association, Goals, Guidelines, and Standards Committee. *The Public Library Mission Statement and Its Imperatives for Service*. Chicago, ALA, 1979, p. 10.
- ² Gross, Elizabeth Henry. *Children's Service in Public Libraries*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1963.
- ³ U.S. Office of Education. *Survey of Public Libraries, LIBGIS I, 1974*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978.
- ⁴ Indiana State Library. *Statistics of Indiana Libraries, 1978*. Indianapolis, Indiana State Library, 1979.
- ⁵ Indiana Library Certification Board. *Official Rules and Regulations*. Indianapolis, Indiana State Library, 1974, p. 15.
- ⁶ Indiana State Library, op. cit., p. 39.