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A Study of the Nonuse of the Humboldt Public Library by Some Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Grade Students

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A Study of the Nonuse of the Humboldt Public Library by Some Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Grade Students

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Abstract

The public library is very much a part of the American scene in urban and rural communities across the nation, but it provides a service that is not used to the full extent possible. Although the library seems to be a consistently busy place, there are still many who do not make regular use of available library materials or facilities. Public libraries are not popular places with the majority of people. Contrary to the title of a well-known library film, statistics indicate that the public library is not "the hottest spot in town".

A Study of the Nonuse of the Humboldt Public Library
by Some Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Grade Students

A Research Paper

Presented to the

Faculty of the Library Science Department

In partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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Read and approved by

Mary Lou McGrew

Elizabeth Martin

Accepted by Department
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Date May 2, 1977

The problem of nonuse encountered at the small public library in Humboldt, Iowa is probably not unique to that facility. A questionnaire-survey was administered to the communities' fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students to determine some of the reasons related to why these students do not use the library. The results of the study were not as conclusive as it was hoped. However, the distance a student lived from the public library, easy access to the school library, and the students not perceiving their classroom teachers as stressing the importance of using the public library appeared to be factors related to the nonuse of this facility.

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The Introduction

The public library is very much a part of the American scene in urban and rural communities across the nation, but it provides a service that is not used to the full extent possible.¹ Although the library seems to be a consistently busy place, there are still many who do not make regular use of available library materials or facilities. Public libraries are not popular places with the majority of people. Contrary to the title of a well-known library film, statistics indicate that the public library is not "the hottest spot in town".²

What appears to be evident is that services of public libraries are not meeting the needs of a portion of the population. The public library staff in Humboldt, Iowa is definitely concerned with the problem of the nonuser.

The Humboldt Public Library was established in 1908. At the present time, the library serves Humboldt and neighboring county seat town of Dakota City, with a combined population of 5,411. Despite the fact that the library is the largest public library in Humboldt County, it must be considered a small library. Because of the very limited collections in the other five libraries within the county and because Humboldt serves as a shopping center for the area,

¹Christina Hoffman SCN, "The Public Library and the Non User," Catholic Library World, 45:443-5, April, 1974.

²Glenn Dockins, "The Nonuser...the libraries" untapped resource," Illinois Libraries, 56:233-4, March, 1974.

the Humboldt Public Library has a clientele from the entire county.

The children's department of the library is located in the basement of the library building. The facility consists of two separate rooms. The smaller room houses the picture book collection, and the other room contains the fiction and nonfiction books, the reference collection and card catalog.

The children's librarian is a young woman who is college educated, but not in the field of librarianship. In the past two years as librarian, she has attempted to initiate new programs to get the children into the library, as well as to continue with the most popular program, the Story Hour for preschoolers. Her interest and sincerity have made this program even more successful, and preschoolers and primary students appear to be regular visitors to the library. A major concern of the librarian is the lack of interest and use of the facility by the upper elementary students of the community.

The age-old problem of providing what the public wants and what the library staff believes should be available has been a concern. The Children's Collection has a total of 10,319 volumes, with 7,109 fiction books and 3,210 nonfiction and reference books. The only nonprint material available for use, either in the library or at home, is a record collection. The collection is housed in the adult section; however, the records may be checked out or used by

the children in the library. Circulation figures for 1975 for the children's department revealed that a total of 16,003 books were borrowed, which is a daily average of fifty-four books. The library is open Monday through Saturday, 12:30 P.M. to 5:30 P.M.

It is the opinion of the librarian that the children are more interested in recreational type of reading, and, as a result, the reference material and nonfiction section are somewhat outdated. Because of a limited budget, the librarian felt it necessary to provide the type of material that the public appeared to want and would use.

The Problem

The problem of nonuse encountered at the Humboldt Public Library is a concern for the staff of this facility. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to deal with the following specific problem: What are the reasons given for the nonuse of the children's department of the Humboldt Public Library by some fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students as compared to students at the same level who use that public facility? Eight hypotheses of the study are stated below.

1. Nonusers more than users view the nonfiction and reference collection as out of date

2. Nonusers more than users tend not to perceive classroom teachers as encouraging them to use the public library as a source of information and learning materials

3. Nonusers more than users lack the needed library skills to use the facility independently.

4. Nonusers more than users believe the public library is unnecessary because of the availability of the school library

5. Nonusers more than users perceive the public library staff as unfriendly and unhelpful

6. Nonusers live a greater distance from the public facility than users of the facility

7. Nonusers more than users find the library facility inaccessible because of its hours of service

8. Students who are involved in more adult sponsored activities tend to be the nonusers of the public facility

Several limitations have been set because of the type of study undertaken. Two of the limitations were concerned with the population of the study. The study involved only fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students enrolled in either the private or public schools in Humboldt, Iowa. Another limitation imposed on the study concerned the use of the terms "user" and "nonuser". These terms referred only to the clientele of the Humboldt Public Library. Another limitation concerned the time period of nonuse of the facility. June 1975 to June 1976 was selected in order to keep the study within bounds and allow the researcher to begin work in September of 1976.

To ensure the reader of a more complete understanding, the following terms have been defined in relation to

this study. The children's department referred to the section of the Humboldt Public Library which is designated specifically for children, preschool age through the sixth grade. The facility referred to the public library located in Humboldt, Iowa, and this term was used interchangeably with public library and Humboldt Public Library. A nonuser was defined as a student who had not checked out any materials from the public library more than once during the period of June 1975 through June 1976. The term primary student referred to the children enrolled in the Humboldt Public School or St. Mary's Catholic Grade School located in Humboldt who were in kindergarten through the third grade. Other students were all fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in the Humboldt Public School and the corresponding grade level students who attended St. Mary's Catholic School in Humboldt. The term user was defined as a student who had checked out materials from the public library more often than once during the specified time period of the study, June 1975 through June 1976.

Review of Related Literature

The scarcity of research on public library services to children is unfortunate. The writer's difficulty in locating material relevant to this study possibly indicates this scarcity. In a period of economic cutback and taxpayer revolts, a crying need exists to identify, examine, and evaluate the public library's role in providing library ser-

vices to children.³

Pauline Winnick stated in a study that there were no quantitative standards to offer criteria with which to evaluate children's services in the public library or to determine what was most effective in attaining the objectives of library work with children. This study on evaluating public library services to children recommended the development of criteria for measuring the quality of children's services in the public library and evaluating its program impact on users.⁴ As the author explained:

Most library statistics of today and even library standards, deal almost exclusively with the library's capacity to perform rather than its actual performance of how these services are used.⁵

Berlson's study, done over twenty-five years ago, showed that only ten percent of the adult population used the library, and half of those were adults under the age of thirty-five.⁶

Several articles reviewed by the writer revealed that nonusers were an area of concern. The articles by Dockins and Bush both deal with nonuse of the public li-

³Marion F. Gallivan, "Research on Children's Services in Libraries: An Annotated Bibliography," Top of the News, 30:227, April, 1974.

⁴Pauline Winnick, "Evaluation of Public Library Services to Children," Library Trends, 22:361-76, January, 1974.

⁵Ibid., p.364.

⁶Hoffman, op. cit., p.445.

brary. Statistics for the state of Illinois for 1971 showed that only 36.5 percent of the eligible library users had actually registered for a public library card. At best, the public libraries of Illinois were serving about one out of three people. Dockins also stated that libraries were oriented primarily towards serving the scholar, students, and "bookish" people, with the nonuser being the forgotten individual. Dockins also expressed a concern about "first timers" who were bewildered by things that librarians took for granted. With little knowledge of how to use the facilities and often hesitant to ask for help, it took but a short time for the individual to come to the conclusion that the library had nothing for him. Ideally, the library is a cultural center, but unless it is made into a place of interest, it may never attract that two-thirds majority of nonusers.⁷

Bush reported that of 123 libraries which responded to a survey, most of the libraries offered programs of interest for 8-10 year olds. Only a few mentioned any specific programs for the older elementary child.⁸

Parker and Paisley studied factors that influenced public library circulation. It was found that juvenile circulation was much less predictable from community character-

⁷Dockins, op. cit., pp.233-4.

⁸Margaret Bush, "Who's Doing What Where? A Survey," Illinois Libraries, 55:5508, January, 1973.

istics than was adult usage. Educational background, income, and age were all elements in adult circulation, but did not exert any influence on juvenile usage of the public library.⁹

In a federally funded research project of the Indiana State Library by Wilder, figures established that youthful users were a major factor in contemporary library use. Small libraries, with over one-half of their usage coming from youths aged nineteen and under, reported that the largest proportion came from the 14-16 year olds, who represented twenty-five percent of the total users. Children twelve and under constituted twenty percent, and the 17-19 year olds twelve percent of the users. All libraries that reported, regardless of size, showed young people were substantial supporters of the public library. In fact, the nineteen percent of the visits by youths who stated they make visits to the library no more often than once per month is almost half again as large as the twelve percent of the visits made by the infrequent users among adults. The implication of this appeared to be that as students became adults, there was a tendency for those who were occasional library users as youths to drop from the ranks of library patrons.¹⁰

⁹Edwin B. Parker and William J. Paisley, "Predicting Library Circulation from Community Characteristics," Public Opinion Quarterly, 29:39-50, Spring, 1965.

¹⁰Philip S. Wilder, Jr., Library Usage by Students and Young Adults, U.S., Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 046 472, September, 1970.

In the Wilder study, forty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they were using their visits to the library as a means of securing help with school work. The study strongly suggested that help with school work may have been the single most important motivation in bringing the students to the library.¹¹

If public libraries are to survive, they must make a greater effort to meet the needs of the total public which they are funded to serve, not just a small portion of the population. A major effort must be made to provide the public with informational and recreational services, as the needs arise. Skelton suggested in his study that the teaching of library skills appeared to be a necessity, because otherwise even children who desired to use the library would not be able to do so. He also stated that children must be "indoctrinated" into becoming library users. His premise stated that it was easier to build life-long habits if they were learned at a younger age.¹²

It appeared from the review of related literature that students were users of the public library and that skills and attitudes acquired in childhood would be reflected in habits that carried over into adulthood. Evidence revealed that the problem of finding ways to extend and to

¹¹ Ibid., p.14.

¹² John L. Skelton, "Cultivating the Library Habit," Wilson Library Bulletin, 50:59-62, September, 1975.

enlarge the use of the public library still exists today. The public library is not being used to its fullest potential or meeting the needs of the students and adults who are at present nonusers. Therefore, the public library at Humboldt can not ignore the students who are nonusers.

Methodology

The procedure used in this study rested upon the assumption that nonuse of the public library was a phenomenon that was related to the reasons which were stated in the eight hypotheses. Another assumption was that the students knew why they did not use the public library and the writer attempted to identify some of the reasons for the nonuse of the public library by using the information supplied by the population of the study.

The information was obtained by asking students for specific information through the use of a questionnaire. It was assumed by this writer that information acquired from the users of the public library would differ from information supplied by the nonusers of the facility and that these differences would suggest to what extent the hypotheses of the study were valid, within the limit of the study.

The total population of the study consisted of fifth, sixth, and seventh graders enrolled in the Humboldt Community Schools and St. Mary's Catholic Grade School located in Humboldt, Iowa. The fourth grade students enrolled in the schools for the 1976-1977 school year were excluded from the

population, as they were primary students during the specific time span of the study, June 1975 through June 1976. All seventh grade students were included as they were enrolled in the sixth grade during the same time period. The total enrollment of the grade levels included in the population was 417 students. However, all new students in both school districts were eliminated from the population. Therefore, the adjusted total population of the study was 387 students. This writer chose to eliminate all students, new to the districts because 90 percent of them had not obtained library cards. It was the opinion of the researcher that information from the three students who had obtained library cards would have no bearing on the outcome of this study, thus all were omitted. (See Table 1, page 31.)

The data were gathered from a questionnaire which was administered by this writer in the classrooms of the various grade levels included in the population of the study. Considering the use of school time to administer the questionnaire, there was no follow-up to reach those students who were absent when the questionnaire was administered. A total of twenty-three students were absent when the data-gathering instrument was completed by the other students. As a result, 94.1 percent of the population completed the questionnaire on which the study was based.

The public library in Humboldt follows the procedure of stamping the "due date" on the student's library card as well as on the materials to be checked out. With a list of students in the population, the researcher examined the file

in the library which contains the students' library cards. As was previously stated, the time span for the study was June 1975 through June 1976 and by examining each student's library card and noting the dates that material was due, the researcher determined if a student was a user or nonuser of the public library during this period of time.

The list of all students included in the population was obtained from school officials. After the students completed the questionnaire concerning the public library, the data were recorded according to the individual's status as a user or nonuser of the facility as defined for the study.

All of the students in the population of the study who had not been issued a library card were considered nonusers if they attended either the public or private schools in Humboldt anytime during the period of study, June 1975 through June 1976. The students new to both school districts in the fall of 1976 were omitted from the study for reasons previously given. All of the students who had used the facility only once during the time period were considered the nonusers for the study, as well as the students who had not used the facility at all. The students in the population who had checked out materials more than once during the stated time period were considered the users for this research project.

The period of time just before and just after the Christmas holidays was used to examine the charge file. This proved to be an excellent time for the writer to exam-

ine the students' library cards as many of the students were not using materials during this busy season. As a result, it was only necessary for the children's librarian to check on fifteen of the students whose cards were not in the file because they had materials checked out of the library. She accomplished the task over a period of several weeks and determined, as materials were returned, if the students were users or nonusers of the library as individual library cards were examined for the "due dates".

The procedure described above gave the researcher access to all of the students' library cards, and an accurate list of the users and nonusers among the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students was completed. The following table shows a breakdown by grade level of the users and nonusers of the Humboldt Public Library.

| <u>Grade Level</u> | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 4 | 65 | 37 |
| 5 | 67 | 57 |
| 6 | <u>55</u> | <u>83</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 |

The questionnaire, designed to elicit data pertinent to the eight hypotheses, was given in the most efficient manner possible. Standard instructions were given to all students by the researcher and the importance of an honest, accurate, and open response was stressed. A student's name on the questionnaire was essential and the writer clearly

stated that all information gathered would remain confidential. It was pointed out that the results would be used only for this research project and while the student's name was important for tallying purposes, student identity would not be revealed.

In light of the fact that school time was used to administer the questionnaire, the various grade levels involved, and a desire to ensure the cooperation of the students, it was imperative that the questionnaire be brief.

Items on the data-gathering instrument were limited to one question per hypothesis with two items that consisted of a two-part question. All items consisted of a question numbered the same as the hypothesis it concerned. The respondents were asked to check a response that was nearest their opinion from several options. A spontaneous response was also an option in two of the items. This made the data at least somewhat quantifiable, yet permitted the students to express their opinions accurately.

The writer was cognizant of the many limitations associated with the construction of a valid questionnaire. Much effort was required to construct an instrument which would eliminate these problems to the fullest extent possible. To further insure the validity of the questionnaire, a pretest was given to twelve fourth graders and twelve eighth graders to determine if the questionnaire would elicit the material applicable to the project. An attempt was made to keep the atmosphere informal while these students

completed the questionnaire. They were encouraged to ask questions and were given an explanation of why it was important to do so. While this group had no problems with the questions as they appeared on the questionnaire, it became apparent in the various classrooms that many students in the population misinterpreted question 6c. The students did not understand that the elementary attendance centers were part of the Humboldt Community School District. It was verbally explained to each group of students as they completed the questionnaire. However, the researcher eventually obtained a list of new students from each attendance center to ensure that no errors were made in identifying new students. The students at St. Mary's Catholic Grade School encountered no difficulty with the question as it was stated.

Analysis of the Data

As previously stated, the eight hypotheses of the study were tested by specific items on the questionnaire, which was completed by the population of the study.

The first hypothesis of the study stated that non-users more than users viewed the nonfiction and reference collection of the children's department as out-of-date. This hypothesis was not confirmed by the results of the questionnaire. It was revealed that sixty-six students, 37.3 percent of the nonusers, believed that the material was up-to-date, but the majority of the nonusers, 57.6 percent or 102 students, admitted that they had no knowledge concerning this section of the library. Therefore, it

appeared that this was not a factor involved in the nonuse of the public library. It was also revealed that among the users of the library, 60.4 percent responded by stating that they also believed the material was up-to-date. The following table shows how the respondents viewed the reference collection in the public library.

| | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> |
|------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Outdated | 11 (5.9%) | 9 (5.1%) |
| Up-to-date | 113 (60.4) | 66 (37.3) |
| Don't know | <u>63 (33.7)</u> | <u>102 (57.6)</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 |

The second hypothesis stated that nonusers more than users tend not to perceive their teachers as encouraging them to use the public library. This hypothesis appeared to be confirmed by the study, as 121 students, or 68.4 percent of the nonuser group, did not remember that their teachers suggested that they use the public library more than once during the past school year. Only fifty-six students, 31.6 percent of the nonusers, remembered that their teachers suggested that they use the public library two or more times during the past school year. Among the user group, 107 students, 57.2 percent, did not remember that their teachers suggested more than once that they use the public library. However, eighty students, 42.8 percent, could recall their teachers suggesting two or more times during the previous school year that they use the public library for needed

materials. The implication of these results, as seen in the table below, is that nonusers do not recall as frequently as the users of the library that classroom teachers suggest that they use the public library for material and help.

| | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 0 to 1 time | 107 (57.2%) | 121 (68.4%) |
| 2 or more times | <u>80 (42.8)</u> | <u>56 (31.6)</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 |

The third hypothesis was tested by a two-part item on the questionnaire. The hypothesis stated that nonusers more than users lacked the library skills needed to use the facility independently. The results did not indicate that this was true. Eighty-seven percent of the nonusers, as compared to 85.5 percent of the users, said that they could use the card catalog without assistance. It was noted that 2.3 percent of the nonusers, as compared to 2.7 percent of the users, admitted that they did not know how to use the tool at all, while 10.7 percent of the nonuser group and 11.8 percent of the user group were not sure that they could use the card catalog without help.

The second part of the item concerned the students' knowledge of the Reader's Guide. The results were similar to those concerning the card catalog. Again, the nonuser group was more certain of its ability to use the library than the user group. In the nonuser group, 24.9 percent of the respondents said that they could use the Reader's Guide

without help, 10.1 percent said that they did not know how to use this tool, and 65 percent were not sure. In the user group, only 20.9 percent of the respondents said that they could use the Reader's Guide without assistance, 9.6 percent admitted that they had not learned the skill, while 69.5 percent of the group was not sure if they could use the Reader's Guide independently. These results leave the third hypothesis of the study unconfirmed. It should be noted, however, that 10.1 percent of the nonusers stated that they did not know how to use the Reader's Guide, as compared to 9.6 percent of the users who also admitted their inability to use this tool.

The following table shows how the students rated their own ability to use the card catalog and the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature.

| | <u>Ability to use Card Catalog</u> | | <u>Ability to use Reader's Guide</u> | |
|----------|--|------------------|--|-----------------|
| | <u>Users</u> | <u>Nonusers</u> | <u>Users</u> | <u>Nonusers</u> |
| Yes | 160 (85.5%) | 154 (87%) | 39 (20.9%) | 44 (24.9%) |
| No | 5 (2.7) | 4 (2.3) | 18 (9.6) | 18 (10.1) |
| Not sure | <u>22 (11.8)</u> | <u>19 (10.7)</u> | <u>130 (69.5)</u> | <u>115 (65)</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 | 187 | 177 |

The fourth item on the questionnaire concerned the hypothesis which stated that nonusers more than users believed the public library to be unnecessary because of the availability of the school library. It was revealed through the questionnaire that among the nonusers of the public

library, 131 students, 74 percent, usually obtained any needed material from the school library, thirty-three or 18.6 percent of the nonusers reported that they obtained materials at home, and thirteen students, 7.4 percent, relied on the public library. This compared to the user group in the following way: 105 students or 56.2 percent stated that they mainly used the school library for needed materials, forty-four students or 23.5 percent used the public library, while thirty-eight or 20.3 percent used materials found at home. The results of the questionnaire indicated that more nonusers use the school library when in need of library materials, whereas the users ~~are~~^{seemed} willing to search further and avail themselves of other opportunities. It is the opinion of the researcher, based on the results as shown in the following table, that this hypothesis was confirmed.

| | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| At home | 38 (20.3%) | 33 (18.6%) |
| At public library | 44 (23.5) | 13 (7.4) |
| At school library | 105 (56.2) | 131 (74) |
| Others | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 |

The fifth hypothesis stated that nonusers more than users perceive the public library staff as unfriendly and unhelpful. In the nonuser group, 123 students or 69.5 percent believed the librarians to be friendly and helpful, as

compared to 178 students or 95.2 percent of the user group. However, forty-five respondents in the nonuser group or 25.4 percent said that they knew nothing about the personalities of the librarians because they did not go to the library. In the user group, 2.1 percent of the students felt that the librarians were friendly, but not willing to help, and 4 percent of the nonusers agreed with that description. The same percentage of both groups (1.1) labeled the librarians as both unfriendly and unhelpful. Although it appeared that more nonusers believed the librarians to be unfriendly and unhelpful, it must be pointed out that one-fourth of the respondents did not know the staff well enough to form an opinion. This writer does not believe that a definite conclusion concerning the personalities of the librarians was indicated by the study as a factor which influenced the use or nonuse of the public facility. The results from the questionnaire concerning this item are shown in the following table.

| | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Friendly and helpful | 178 (95.2%) | 123 (69.5%) |
| Friendly, not willing to help | 4 (2.1) | 7 (4) |
| Unfriendly and unhelpful | 2 (1.1) | 2 (1.1) |
| Don't know | <u>3 (1.6)</u> | <u>45 (25.4)</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 |

The first item on the questionnaire that referred to

the sixth hypothesis elicited information concerning the distance a student lived from the public library facility. The hypothesis stated that nonusers lived a greater distance from the public library than did the users of the public library.

The results of the questionnaire indicated that distance does influence a student's use of the library. Data revealed that 87.6 percent or 155 students identified as nonusers lived six or more blocks from the public library, as compared to 68.4 percent or 128 of the students who use the public facility and lived the same distance from the public library. The results also revealed that fifty-nine users or 31.6 percent, as compared to twenty-two nonusers or 12.4 percent, said that they lived one to five blocks from the public library.

The second part of the question identified rural students who were required to ride a bus to school. Among the nonusers of the library, eighty respondents or 45.2 percent lived in the country and had to depend on bus transportation to and from school. However, ninety-seven or 54.8 percent of the students who were identified as nonusers lived in town. The results appeared to indicate that the necessity of riding a bus to school had little bearing on the students' nonuse of the public library.

As can be noted in the following table, the distance a student lived from the public library seemed to be a factor related to the nonuse of the library by those students who lived in town. However, distance did not appear

to influence the use of the public library by the rural bus students.

| | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------|
| 1 to 5 blocks | 59 (31.6%) | 22 (12.4%) | |
| 6 or more blocks | <u>128 (68.4)</u> | <u>155 (87.6)</u> | |
| Total | 187 | 177 | |
| 12.6 Live in country | 46 (24.6%) ^{36.5} | 80 (45.2%) ^{63.5} | 22.4 |
| 38.7 Live in town | <u>141 (75.4)</u> | <u>97 (54.8)</u> | 26.7 |
| Total | 187 ^{59.2} | 177 ^{46.8} | |

The seventh hypothesis pertained to the hours of service provided by the public library. The children's department of the facility is open daily from 12:30 P.M. to 5:30 P.M., Monday through Saturday. It was revealed through the study that 79 students or 42.2 percent of the users would like to see the library open at night. Forty-nine students or 27.7 percent of those who were defined as nonusers also felt that they would use the library more if its hours of service were extended. In the user group, thirty-seven students or 19.8 percent said that they would not use it at night, as did 32.2 percent or fifty-seven students in the nonuser group. However, a large number of students in both groups, as can be noted in the table that follows, indicated that they were uncertain about their use of the public facility during evening hours. While the statistics indicated that the hours of service do not appear to be a factor in the students' nonuse of the library, the group of students

who are uncertain about their use of the library during the evening hours needs to be considered.

| | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Would use library at night | 79 (42.2%) | 49 (27.7%) |
| Wouldn't use library at night | 37 (19.8) | 57 (32.2) |
| Don't know | <u>71 (38)</u> | <u>71 (40.1)</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 |

The last hypothesis of the study is concerned with student involvement in community and school activities. The hypothesis stated that students involved in more adult sponsored activities would tend to be the nonusers of the library.

This hypothesis was tested by the use of a checklist of activities, and the students were asked to indicate any in which they were involved. The researcher stressed to each group that participation meant that the student was involved on a regular basis, and that the activity was adult sponsored or supervised. The seventh grade students were reminded to check activities in which they participated as grade school students the previous year.

This hypothesis was not confirmed by the results of the study, as they appeared to indicate that both users and nonusers were involved in school and community activities, as noted in the table that follows. The amount of time spent on various activities did not influence a student's use of the public library facility, as there was little difference

in the results among the two groups. More users of the library (6.4 percent) as compared to nonusers (5.6 percent) were not involved in any extracurricular or community activity. It was also revealed that 63.9 percent of the nonusers were active in one to four regularly scheduled activities, while 62.6 percent of the users also participated in that number of activities. However, as the number of student activities increased, it was revealed that the users of the library were slightly more involved in activities than were the nonusers. The results show 31 percent of the user group involved in five or more regularly scheduled activities, as compared to 30.5 percent of the nonusers who participated in the scheduled activities. The slight difference indicated that the busiest students find time to visit and use the public library; therefore, this does not appear to be a factor related to the nonuse of the library by these students.

| | <u>Number of Users</u> | <u>Number of Nonusers</u> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 0 activities | 12 (6.4%) | 10 (5.6%) |
| 1 to 4 activities | 117 (62.6) | 113 (63.9) |
| 5 or more activities | <u>58 (31)</u> | <u>54 (30.5)</u> |
| Total | 187 | 177 |

Conclusion

The problem of nonuse encountered at the Humboldt Public Library at the present time is undoubtedly not unique to that facility. Unfortunately, the results of this

research were not as conclusive as it was hoped.

It remains a fact that 48.6 percent of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students of the community are non-users of the public library as defined for this study. However, the factors defined in the hypotheses are apparently only a partial explanation for the nonuse of the public library.

It is the opinion of the researcher that data pertaining to the first four hypotheses of the study indicated that a line of communication between the public library and the schools needs to be established. The circumstances concerning out-dated materials, children not perceiving classroom teachers as encouraging them to use the public library, lack of library skills, and students not using the public library because of easy access to the school library all implied a lack of communication and understanding between the public facility and the school media program.

A definite plan could be established between the school media specialist and the public librarian, so that teachers and students could be informed about activities in the public library as well as new materials available there. Through the same line of communication, the public librarian could be made aware of student needs and curriculum changes, so that materials not available in the school library, yet of interest to the students, possibly could be added to the public library collection.

Library skills are taught in the elementary schools,

but perhaps these skills could be reinforced by a self-help or programmed learning kit at the public library. This could be utilized in the area where the children are already permitted to play table games. Perhaps through these suggestions, more students would realize that the public library does have something to offer them. In the opinion of the writer, the school and public library are not in competition with each other, but should supplement and enrich each other's programs.

Another implication of the study, as seen by this writer, concerned the influence of the friendly and helpful librarian on the library program. The basement facility which houses the children's department of the library is inconvenient, to say the least. The steep stairway, the two separate rooms with the charge desk in the hall between them, and the high windows are not conducive to a warm, inviting atmosphere.

The library board is aware of these facts and has attempted to remedy the situation somewhat by employing a librarian who enjoys her work with children. At the present time, it is the librarian's opinion that more children are now coming to the library and participating in scheduled activities. She also indicated that circulation figures have improved over the past year. As a result, it is the opinion of the researcher that the friendliness, helpfulness, and enthusiasm on the part of the librarian has been a real asset in expanding the library program, and

an important factor in the continued use of the facility by the children.

The sixth and seventh hypotheses referred to the distance which students lived from the public library and the hours of service provided by the facility. As was discussed earlier, a large number of respondents among both the users and nonusers were uncertain about whether they would use the library more if it were open at night. Because of the large number of students involved, the library board could experiment with evening hours on a trial basis to see if the students were interested in using the library during these extended hours. These extra hours of service could also give the students who live the greatest distance from the public library an opportunity to use the library, in case after school commitments did not allow them enough time before the 5:30 P.M. closing.

The results of the study concerning the last hypothesis revealed that the students who are involved in school and extracurricular activities still found time to use the public library. It is the opinion of the researcher that even the busiest students found time to visit and use the public library, just as they found the time to participate in a variety of activities.

It is a widely accepted fact that parents exert great influence on their children's behavior. No doubt, parental influence would be a factor related to the nonuse of the Humboldt Public Library by some of the students.

However, parental influence on student library habits was not within the scope of this study.

The nonuse of the public library remains a problem in Humboldt, Iowa. Some of the factors related to this problem have been identified, but it is recognized by this writer that even if a complete solution to the problem of nonuse in this small Iowa library had been achieved through this study, the results might have little or no effect on the general field of librarianship. It is hoped that through this effort, however, one individual library will be better able to meet the needs of a group of students who, at the present time, are nonusers of the public library.

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QUESTIONNAIRE CONCERNING THE HUMBOLDT PUBLIC LIBRARY

Please check only one answer for each question.

1. In your opinion, which of the following statements best describes the reference section of the Children's Department of the Humboldt Public Library?

- ☐ Outdated (too old to be helpful)
☐ Up-to-date (new enough to be helpful)
☐ Don't know

2. In the past school year, do you remember your teacher suggesting that you use the public library to complete an assignment?

- ☐ 0 to 1 time
☐ 2 or more times

3. a. Can you use the card catalog to locate library materials without the help of the librarian?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

b. Can you use the Reader's Guide to locate library materials without the help of the librarian?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

4. If you need library materials for an assignment, where do you usually get your books and materials?

- ☐ At home
☐ At the public library
☐ At the school library
☐ Others (please list)

5. In your opinion, which statement best describes the librarians at the public library?

- ☐ Friendly and helpful
☐ Friendly, but not willing to help me
☐ Unfriendly and unhelpful
☐ Don't know because I don't go to the public library

6. a. How far do you live from the public library?

- ☐ 1 to 5 blocks
☐ 6 or more blocks

(See other side)

b. Do you live in the country?

☐ Yes
☐ No

c. Were you a student in either the Humboldt Public School or St. Mary's Elementary School last year?

☐ Yes
☐ No

7. Would you use the public library more if it were open at night?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

8. Please check all of the following scheduled activities in which you participate.

☐ After school sports

☐ Girl scouts

☐ Baby sitting

☐ Gymnastics

☐ Band

☐ Karate

☐ Baton twirling

☐ Little theatre group

☐ Bowling

☐ Paper route

☐ Boy Scouts

☐ Photo club

☐ Ceramics

Music lessons (check all in which you participate)

☐ Cheerleading

☐ band instrument

☐ Choir practice
 (at your church)

☐ guitar

☐ Cub Scouts

☐ piano

☐ Dance lesson or group

☐ organ

☐ 4-H

☐ voice or singing

☐ other instrument

List any activities not mentioned

 (name)

 (grade)

Table 1

A Comparison by Grade Level of Elementary Students
Who Completed the Questionnaire

| Grade level | Total number of students enrolled | New students | Total population of study | Number of students absent | Total number who completed questionnaire | % of population who completed questionnaire |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| 4 ¹ | 115 | 5 | 110 ² | 8 | 102 | 92.7% |
| 5 ¹ | 140 | 8 | 132 ² | 8 | 124 | 94 |
| 6 ¹ | <u>162</u> | <u>17</u> | <u>145²</u> | <u>7</u> | <u>138</u> | 95.2 |
| Totals | 417 | 30 | 387 | 23 | 364 | |

¹Grade level of students during time span of study

²Adjusted figure