

EQUAL ACCESS?: THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS ACROSS
ECONOMIC NEIGHBORHOODS

By

JEANNE ANNE HOLCOMB

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2007

© 2007 Jeanne Anne Holcomb

To all the children, may you always have a book to read and caregivers to share their time with you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Dr. Shehan, Dr. Gattone, and Dr. Silva for their mentoring and encouragement, and Sol Hirsch, the director of the Alachua County Library District, for his assistance and willingness to meet with me. It is also important to realize the importance of family in the completion of this project. I feel deep gratitude for my husband because his support and willingness to help care for our daughter was an instrumental factor in the completion of my degree. And my parents because they have always believed in me and encouraged me to follow my dreams. That is the greatest gift any child could have, and it is something I hope to pass on to my children.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
LIST OF FIGURES	6
ABSTRACT	7
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	8
2 METHODS	16
3 CITY INFORMATION	17
4 BOOKSTORES	21
5 COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM	27
6 DENSITY OF CHILDREN	34
7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	38
LIST OF REFERENCES	41
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	43

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
3-1 Map of Gainesville by median household income.....	19
3-2 Map of Gainesville by child density.	20
4-1 Map of Gainesville by median household income with bookstore locations.	26
5-1 Map of Gainesville by median household income with library branch locations.....	32
5-2 Map of Gainesville by median household income with bookmobile stops.	33
6-1 Map of Gainesville by child density with bookstore locations.....	35
6-2 Map of Gainesville by child density with library branch locations.	36
6-3 Map of Gainesville by child density with bookmobile stops.....	37

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

EQUAL ACCESS?: THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS ACROSS
ECONOMIC NEIGHBORHOODS

By

Jeanne Anne Holcomb

May 2007

Chair: Constance Shehan
Major: Sociology

The first years of a child's life are a time of rapid development. Parents and children engage in many activities together, but one very important shared activity is reading. Through strategies used in joint reading, children can learn new words, develop divergent thinking, learn about the social world, and be more prepared to enter school. In addition, adult illiteracy is a continuing problem in the United States, and reading to children can help fight illiteracy. Given the importance of reading to children, it is essential to ensure that every child's family has access to books. While many other factors influence a family's ability to read books together, having access to books is an essential element of this activity. This study seeks to investigate the availability of books in Gainesville, Florida, by exploring the location of bookstores and library branches in reference to varying economic neighborhoods. The specific question addressed is, "Does the accessibility of children's books vary by economic neighborhood?"

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Reading to young children, even before they enter school, offers important benefits for language development. Young children develop vocabulary at a rapid rate; some researchers estimate children can learn five new words a day. Books contain many words that are not often used in spoken language, and children can learn new vocabulary through repeated exposure to the same book. Storybooks contain fifty percent more rare words than prime time television or college student's conversations, and studies have shown that children can learn two new words a day from a single reading session (Senechal & LeFevre, 2001). In addition, research has revealed that children can develop greater expressive language abilities, higher mean lengths of utterances, higher frequencies of phrases, and lower frequencies of single words through interactions with caregivers during picture book reading. In addition, reading to children between the ages of one and three has been found to be significantly correlated with literacy and teacher ratings of oral language skill at age five, as well as with reading comprehension at age seven (Whitehurst et al., 1988). Reading to children, even in babyhood and toddlerhood, significantly impacts language acquisition and later language skills.

Some research has shown that different strategies used during reading sessions can increase the benefits of reading. Parental strategies such as using definitions and recasts have been shown to facilitate the acquisition of new language (Senechal, LeFevre, Hudson, & Lawson, 1996). Recasts occur when a new utterance is built upon a previous one, adding adjectives, subjects, verbs, or objects and allow children to make comparisons between linguistic structures already acquired and new ones (Senechal & Cornell, 1993). Effective techniques also include encouraging children to talk about pictures, asking questions that demand more than a

yes-no answer, giving informative feedback, and progressively changing questions and feedback to adjust with a child's developmental level (Whitehurst et al., 1998).

Reading to young children is also important for school readiness and later school success. Early childhood educators generally agree that use of language, cognition, social and emotional development, and physical well-being contribute to school readiness, and it has been shown that a lack of readiness can stymie academic success. In a study of eleven inner-city schools, literacy skills were identified by teachers as a prerequisite for school success, but these skills were also identified as one of the largest areas of deficit. Half of the teachers felt that their students lacked literacy skills and were not exposed to books or reading. Upon further examination, 68% of the children did not know where to start or which direction to go when reading a story, 26% could not identify the front of a book, and 48% had been read to rarely or not at all and had visited the library only one time or not at all (Wright , Diener, & Kay, 2000). Most studies indicate that children who start school with stronger skills maintain an advantage over their classmates over time (Senechal & LeFevre, 2001). Home reading routines influence oral language skills, listening comprehension skills, and reading skills, all of which are important for school success. In addition, childhood reading routines are strongly associated with graduating from high school or earning a graduate equivalency diploma. (Flores, Tomany-Korman, & Olson, 2005)

In addition to language skills, picture books and time spent in shared reading can also influence a child's critical thinking and imaginative skills. As Holliday (1998) phrases it, "There is much more to reading than getting the words right." Creative thinking and problem-solving skills can be facilitated through reading children's stories by promoting fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. In exercising these skills, children learn to produce a quantity of answers, take different approaches to problems, and pay attention to numerous details. These

skills encourage children to ask more questions, to be more observant individuals, and to apply the information they learn more frequently (Meador, 1998). Creative thinking also allows children to develop their imaginations, which is an aspect of growth that is often undervalued in today's society. Children learn through their imaginative play as they try out new roles and scenarios, and children who are exposed to a range of literature are provided a wealth of information for their imaginations (Cullinan & Carmichael, 1977).

In addition to cognitive development, various aspects of personal development can also be influenced by books. One of the most important and fundamental reasons for reading to child is to give them pleasure (Mahoney & Wilcox, 1985). Once this pleasure is instilled, many opportunities to learn about themselves and their culture is opened. Achieving a sense of identity is a crucial task for children, and their behavioral and psychological development suffers when they do not achieve a firm sense of identity. Identity development is affected by race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other personal characteristics. Reading children's stories that incorporate diversity is one way to support identity development (Morrison & Bordere, 2001), and it is important for children to be able to relate to characters in books. Seeing people who look like them in books conveys a sense of importance, value, and self-pride (Tolson, 1998). Children can also learn aspects of emotional development through books. For instance, after reading or hearing about how characters in books deal with their fears, children may feel more comfortable talking about their own personal fears (Holliday, 1998). Shared reading can also provide an intimate setting that encourages the development of positive social bonds between young children and caregivers (Honig & Shin, 2001). Not only can reading be a pleasurable activity, but it can promote a strong social bond with caregivers and an avenue for identity development.

Children's books also influence a child's understanding of the social world. Books, even children's picture books, are cultural constructions and issues such as gender, race, class, and family structure are an integral part of children's books (Rogers, 1999). Texts reflect the politics and values of society, and in this way, they help in the socialization of children (Fox, 1993). As Paterson (1990) puts it, "Throughout the history of children's books, authors have told their stories not only to entertain but to articulate the prevailing cultural values and social standards." Children learn what other boys and girls do, say, and feel and are given insight into situations different from their own home contexts. Another important aspect of children's books is the presence of role models—children learn what they can and should be like when they grow up (Paterson & Lach, 1990). Thus, children learn much more than language skills through books; they are taught what society expects of them both as children and as adults.

Because books are such an important socialization tool, much attention has been given to the prevalence of prejudice in children's books. For instance, many of the heroes in children's books are white Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking males. Males outnumber the number of females, regardless of whether characters were depicted as human, animals, machines, or fantasy characters, and males are often portrayed as active and competent while females are passive and incompetent. There has recently been a decline in this trend, however, with the numbers of males and females nearing equality and a wider range of situations being portrayed (Paterson & Lach, 1990). Many books also present traditional notions of a proper family being composed of a mom, a dad, and children. Some books also present the notion that old people need to be separated and placed in their own home, separate from the family. In this way, characters are not often responsible for taking care of their elders. It is important to ensure that there is affirming literature for all children, not just those who belong to dominant classes or genders (Fox, 1993)

and that there is respectful treatment of characters of all ages, genders, and racial and ethnic backgrounds (Paterson & Lach, 1990). While books have the power to express inequality and discrimination, they can also assist children in “establishing a positive view about the equality of everybody in society” (Pinsent, 1977).

Various studies have also sought to define “literacy-rich” environments and to discover demographic characteristics that correlate with such environments. For instance, “literacy-rich” home environments are those in which children are read to, sung to, and told stories and that have a number of children’s books, audiotapes, and CD’s in the home. Children from such an environment demonstrated higher reading knowledge and skills than other children, regardless of family income levels. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). In another study, a Child Centered Literacy Orientation was used to describe homes in which children enjoyed looking at books, shared reading was a favorite joint activity, books were shared at bedtime six or more nights a week, and at least ten children’s books were present in the home. Only 39% of homes sampled in this study received a positive CCLO score based on those criteria, and less parental education, minority status, high parent-child ratios, and low incomes were associated with lower CCLO levels (High et al., 1999). The National Center of Education Statistics’ reports that children whose parents had at least a high school diploma or equivalent were more likely to be read to than those children whose parents did not have a high school diploma. Amount of family reading also varied by economic status and by race: nonpoor children were read to the most, poor children were read to the least, and white children were the most likely to be read to, followed by Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and Hispanic (NCES 2006). According to the 2000 National Survey of Early Childhood Health, only one third of Hispanic children were read to daily, and fewer than half of black children were read to daily while almost two thirds of white children

were read to daily. The number of books in the home also varied by race – white families averaged 83 books, black families 41, and Hispanic families 33 (Flores, Tomany-Korman, & Olson, 2005). To sum, studies indicate that race, income, and education level influence the amount of time spent reading with children and the amount of emphasis placed on creating a reading-friendly environment at home.

Children who do not learn to read are at an increased risk of being illiterate in adulthood, and adult illiteracy continues to be a concerning issue (High et al., 1999). According to the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL 2003), 11 million adults remain nonliterate. Seven million of these adults could not answer questions because of language barriers, and the other four million could not answer simple test questions. The data were collected through a nationally representative assessment of all adults age sixteen and older, and it addressed three types of literacy: prose, document, and quantitative. The main goal of the assessment was to measure the level to which adults used printed information to function adequately in their homes, workplaces, and communities. Questions to address prose literacy included comprehension questions related to brochures and instructional materials, document literacy involved job applications and drug labels, and quantitative literacy involved balancing a checkbook and completing an order form. Ninety-three million Americans remain at the basic or below basic levels of prose literacy, meaning that they can only perform simple and everyday literacy activities. Several populations were over-represented in the below basic level. For instance, of those in the below basic level, fifty-five percent did not graduate from high school, while only fifteen percent of the general population did not graduate from high school. In addition, while both Blacks and Hispanics each comprise twelve percent of the general population, the below basic group was thirty-nine percent Hispanic and twenty percent Black. Economic status also

correlates with literacy rates; the literacy proficiency of the poor, near poor, and recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children were well below average on all three scales (NAAL 2003). Based on these studies, minority status, low educational attainment, and low economic status are correlated with lower levels of literacy.

Adult illiteracy has serious consequences. Decreased productivity, high unemployment, low earnings, high rates of welfare dependency, and high rates of teen pregnancy are all related to poor literacy skills. With an increased emphasis on technologically advanced, computer-based occupations, individuals who lack basic reading and writing skills are unable to compete for jobs (High et al., 1999). The National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that mean literacy proficiencies on all three scales (prose, document, and quantitative) were higher for those in the labor force than for those not actively participating in the labor force at the time of the study. Of those participating in the labor force, respondents who had literacy proficiencies in the lowest level had unemployment rates four to seven times higher than respondents scoring in the highest level. Workers in finance, insurance, and real estate industries had the highest mean literacy proficiencies while farm, fishing, and forestry workers had the lowest. Likewise, professional workers, managers, administrators, and technical workers had the highest mean literacy proficiencies while semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers had the lowest mean proficiency rates. As the National Assessment of Adult Illiteracy report phrased it, “Literacy deficits seem to be an important barrier to the employability of the poor or near poor who are not active in the labor force.” (NAAL 2003).

Adult literacy varies by education level, race, and income, and these same variables are associated with the likelihood of reading to children and creating a literacy-rich environment. Thus, there is a vicious cycle of inequality regarding which children are more likely to be read to

and to be given this benefit in their childhood. It could be hypothesized that greater exposure to books and being read to more often could have both short-term and long-term benefits: children's vocabulary, reading, and language skills could improve in the short-term and could influence greater school achievement and a lower risk of poverty in the long-term. (Flores 2005). Given the importance of reading to children, both in terms of child development as well as combating illiteracy, it is important to explore the equal availability of books. It is crucial to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic status or race, have quality books available to them and their caregivers. The question this study seeks to address is, "Does the accessibility of children's books vary by economic neighborhood?" Gainesville, Florida will be used as a case study, and the locations of bookstores, the locations and sizes of collections in the public library branches, library policies, and community programs will be included in the analysis. The purpose of this study is not to explore the effectiveness of reading programs; it is to examine if there are differences in the availability of books across neighborhoods that vary by social class.

CHAPTER 2 METHODS

Census data was obtained to determine areas of economic status in Gainesville, FL. The income measurement used is the median household income by block group from the 2000 Census. Gainesville is a large university town, so therefore some of the income data was skewed because of the large number of students. While it is true that students have very low household incomes, it is not an accurate indicator of economic status for this study. Therefore, some neighborhoods, such as those on the university campus or very close to the university were not considered.

Once the economic areas of interest were determined, the elementary school within these areas was used to calculate the distance to each library branch and bookstore. Mapquest.com was used for these calculations. For each book location, the number of children's books, the price range of books, if applicable, and the availability of public transportation was ascertained. Employees at each bookstore said it is against company policy to release inventory information, so the number of books is an estimate based on visits to the locations. Library funding and policy information was obtained through an interview with the library director, and information about public transportation was determined by using the city bus route schedule.

The number of children by census block was also obtained from the 2000 Census to determine where the most children were in relation to the location of books. For this study, children under four were the most accessible group in the data set and were the most relevant to discuss the importance of reading to children before they enter school or in the early school years. The distance from the areas with the most children to the nearest book location was determined.

CHAPTER 3 CITY INFORMATION

Gainesville, Florida has an area of approximately fifty square miles and is located in Alachua County in North Central Florida. According to the 2005 American Community Survey, the population was estimated to be close to 100,879. It is home to the University of Florida, which houses an additional ninety-two thousand people in campus housing. The median age was twenty-six, and there were approximately six thousand children under the age of five. In addition, the population is approximately sixty-three percent White, twenty-five percent Black, and six percent Asian. Almost seven percent of the population identified as Hispanic or Latino of any race. The median household income in 2005 was \$26,954, and 20.8 percent of the families fell below the national poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau).

The neighborhoods with the highest household income, the lowest household income, and the area with the highest percentage of children aged four and under were of particular interest for this study. As was already mentioned, income data from students complicated the matter of determining the area of lowest income. The block group with the lowest income, that was clearly not associated with students at the university, was block group 5 in census tract 7. The median household income in this area was \$10,850. The block group with the highest income was block 2 in census tract 22.08, and the median household income for this area was \$92,683. Block group 2 in census tract 6 had the highest percentage of children, 6.6%. These three areas will be the focus of the discussion. Figures 3-1 and 3-2 depict Gainesville by median household income and child density, respectively.

Another important aspect of this study is the availability of public transportation in Gainesville. The Regional Transit System manages thirty-six bus routes, ten of which serve the University of Florida campus, but there were only twenty-two city bus routes on the schedule at

the time of this study. RTS operates eighty-eight busses and serves an area of approximately seventy-four square miles. There are a variety of fare options for riders: an adult fare is one dollar, an all day pass can be purchased for two dollars, and a monthly pass costs thirty dollars. In addition, children who are shorter than the farebox ride for free, and senior citizens and disabled persons ride for half price. The frequency of busses on each route varies by the time of day, the day of the week, and the time of the year. For the schedule used in this study, most routes had a cycle of between eight minutes and an hour on weekdays. Fourteen routes ran on Saturdays and the frequency was between thirty and ninety minutes. Nine city routes ran on Sundays, and all of those routes ran every hour. It is important to note that the city bus schedule varies with the University's academic calendar, so there is often reduced bus service on school holidays. The bus system has been criticized for providing little service to the residents of the eastern region of the city, which is a region of noticeably lower income. In the RTS Final Transit Development Plan, it is recognized that public transit provides mobility and access to employment, shopping, and entertainment, especially for low-income persons who might not have access to a car (Regional Transit System 2006).

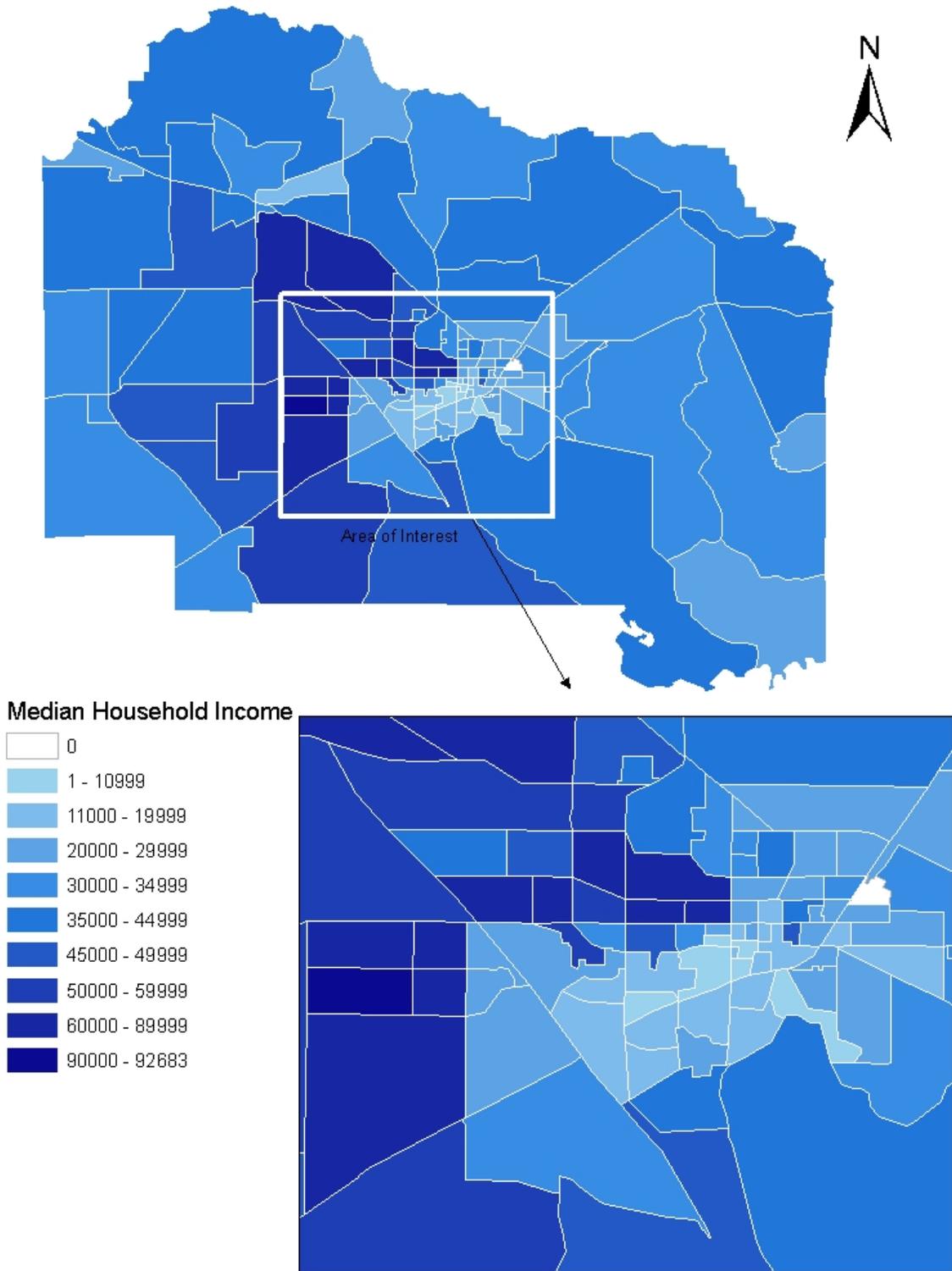


Figure 3-1. Map of Gainesville by median household income.

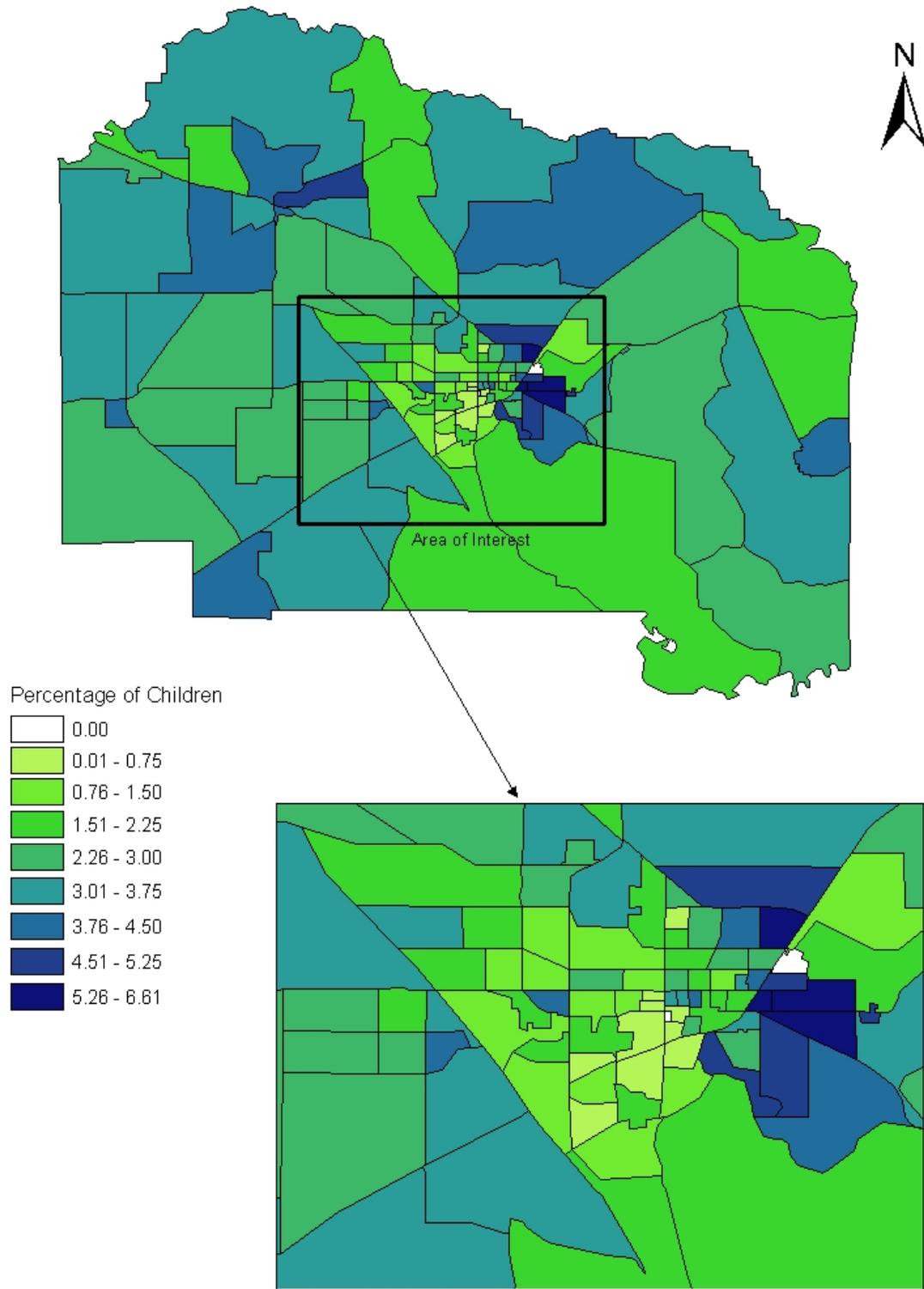


Figure 3-2. Map of Gainesville by child density.

CHAPTER 4 BOOKSTORES

There are four major bookstores within Gainesville city limits: Borders, Books a Million, Barnes and Noble, and Waldenbooks. All of these bookstores have over a thousand children's books in their stores, and the prices range from three dollars for Golden Books to thirty-five dollars for larger storybooks that contain a collection of stories in one book. There is also a smaller bookstore, Goerings, which has about two hundred children's books whose prices range from five to twenty dollars. In addition, there is a used bookstore, Gainesville Book Company, that has an inventory similar to the larger bookstores. At this location, prices range from twenty-five cents to two dollars for children's books. In the following sections, the store hours, the availability of public transportation, and the distances from the poorest and wealthiest neighborhoods will be discussed for each store. Figure 4-1 is a map of Gainesville by median household income with the bookstore locations.

Barnes and Noble. Barnes and Noble is located in a large shopping center with over one hundred other stores. The complex, which is the largest retail center in the southeast United States, is comprised of over 1.2 million square feet and is home to many popular stores, including Best Buy, OfficeMax, Publix, Target, Petsmart, and Lowes. Barnes and Noble is open 9am–10pm Monday through Thursday, 9am–11pm Friday and Saturday, and 10am–10pm on Sunday (Butler Plaza).

Three bus routes provide service to the area, but route 75 provides the most direct access. This route provides service every 35 minutes from 6am until 10am, every 53 minutes from 10am until 5pm, and every 35 minutes from 5pm until 8:16pm, when service ends for the day. This route can connect with routes 5, 20, and 1 and runs every 90 minutes from 7:30am to 5pm on Saturday. No route provides direct service on Sunday (Regional Transit System 2007).

Barnes and Noble is located between the wealthiest and the poorest neighborhoods. To be more specific, it is 6.99 miles away from the elementary school in the poorest area, and 6.16 miles from the school in the wealthiest area. Neither location has a direct bus route to the bookstore. The wealthiest area is located beyond any bus route, and residents of the poorest area would have to transfer. Route 2 does serve the poorest neighborhood, but it only runs once an hour. This route goes to the downtown plaza, where a transfer to route 1 would be possible. Route 1 runs at least every thirty minutes Monday–Saturday. While it doesn't stop at the closest bus stop to the bookstore, it would be possible either to walk or to transfer to route 75. As mentioned above, route 75 provides the most direct access to the bookstore; however, this route does not serve either of the neighborhoods of interest and would involve multiple transfers for those travelling from the poorest neighborhood. It would be possible to access the store on Sundays by transferring to route 402 from route 406, but this route also uses the further bus stop. No bus route provides direct access on Sunday.

Borders and Waldenbooks. Borders and Waldenbooks are part of the same company, Borders Group, and they are less than half a mile away from one another. Waldenbooks is located in the mall, which is home to over one hundred stores, a food court, and a children's play area, and it is more easily accessed by bus routes. Three bus routes service the mall whereas only one route services the shopping center that Borders is located in. For these reasons, only Waldenbooks will be discussed in this section. This bookstore is open 10am–9pm Monday–Thursday, 10am–10pm Friday and Saturday, and 11am–6pm on Sunday.

Routes 5, 20, and 75 all service the mall. The schedule for route 75 was discussed above, so it will not be repeated here. Route 5 runs every twenty minutes from 6am–4pm and every half an hour from 4pm until 2am, Monday–Friday. This route connects with routes 75, 20, 43, 34, 8,

10, 1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 15, and 24. On weekdays, route 20 runs every ten minutes 6am–6:30pm and every half an hour from 6:30pm to 2am. This route can connect with routes 5, 75, 9, 12, 21, 35, and 36. Both route 20 and route 5 run every half an hour on Saturday. On Sunday, service is provided by routes 400 and 401, which run every hour from 10:30am until 4:30pm. Both 400 and 401 can connect to 402, 403, 406, and 407, and 400 additionally connects to 408 (RTS 2007).

The Waldenbooks location used to map traveling distances is closer to the wealthy neighborhood. It is 10.32 miles from the school in the poor area, but only 4.11 miles from the school in the wealthy area. It is also important to remember that this location is really three bookstores—the Books-A-Million, Borders, and Waldenbooks stores were all located within half a mile and only one address was used in efforts to simplify the analysis. As mentioned above, no bus route served the wealthiest area. To access these bookstores, specifically the mall, residents in the poor area would need to get on route 2 and transfer to route 5. On Sunday, route 406 serves the poorest area, and it would be possible to take this route to the downtown plaza and then transfer to either route 400 or 401, both of which stop at the Mall (RTS 2007).

Books-A-Million. There are two Books-A-Million locations in Gainesville. One is located within half a mile from the Borders and Waldenbooks, and the other is located almost six miles away. Both stores had a similar inventory, and both had inviting children’s areas with a children’s table and chairs, a train set, and cushioned adult chairs. For the purposes of measurement, only the location further from the other bookstores will be used here. This Books-A-Million location is open 9am–11pm, Monday through Saturday and 9am–9pm on Sunday.

Bus routes 6 and 15 service the shopping center where the Books-A-Million is located. Route 6 provides service every hour from 7am until 7pm Monday-Saturday. Route six runs

every hour Monday–Saturday. On weekdays, Route 15 provides service every half an hour 6:30am–10am, every hour from 10am to 2pm, and every half an hour from 2pm to 6pm. It provides service every hour from 7am until 5pm on Saturday. On Sunday, the store could be accessed by route 407, which runs every hour from 10am–5pm (RTS 2007).

This bookstore is closer to the poorer neighborhood. While traveling distance from the school in the poorer neighborhood is only 3.93 miles, it was 10.11 miles from the wealthier neighborhood. It would be possible to take route 2 from the poorest area and transfer to either route 6 or 15. On Sunday, residents could take route 406 to the downtown plaza and transfer to route 407 to get to the bookstore (RTS 2007).

Goerings bookstore. Like Books-A-Million, there are two Goerings locations in Gainesville. One caters almost exclusively to the university campus and has no children’s books. The other location does carry children’s books, and it is this second location that will be considered here. The store hours of this location were 10am–9:30pm, Monday–Saturday and 10am–5pm on Sunday.

Bus routes 5 and 43 both serve the shopping center where this bookstore is located. Route five runs every twenty minutes from 6am to 4pm, Monday–Friday. It runs every half an hour from 4pm until 2:30am on weekdays and from 7am until 2:30am on Saturday. Route 43 runs every hour on weekdays and does not provide weekend service. Route 400, which runs every hour, provides service on Sunday (RTS 2007).

Goerings is closer to the poorer neighborhood. Traveling distance from the poorer neighborhood is 4.27 miles, but it is 6.58 miles from the wealthier area. It would be accessible to residents of the poorest neighborhood by transferring to route 5 or 43 from route 2. On Sunday, a transfer from route 406 to route 400 would provide access to the store (RTS 2007).

Gainesville Book Company. The Gainesville Book Company is a used bookstore that is open every other weekend. It is open on Saturday 8–4 and Sunday 12–4, and it is run by a man and a woman with a passion for books. They have the most and the least expensive children’s books in Gainesville, and it is a secluded store front in a storage shed complex. No bus route provides service to this location. It is 5.48 miles from the wealthier neighborhood and 13.22 miles from the poorer neighborhood.

It should also be noted that people might buy books from stores where they routinely shop, such as the supermarket, not just from stores that sell specifically books. For this reason, two supermarkets will also be addressed in this section. One is the closest supermarket to the poorest neighborhood, and the other is the closest supermarket to the wealthiest neighborhood. The supermarket closest to the poorest area did carry children’s books. However, the selection was limited to Christmas board books (it was spring when the visit occurred) and Look & Find books. The prices ranged from four to six dollars. The supermarket closest to the wealthiest area did not carry children’s books.

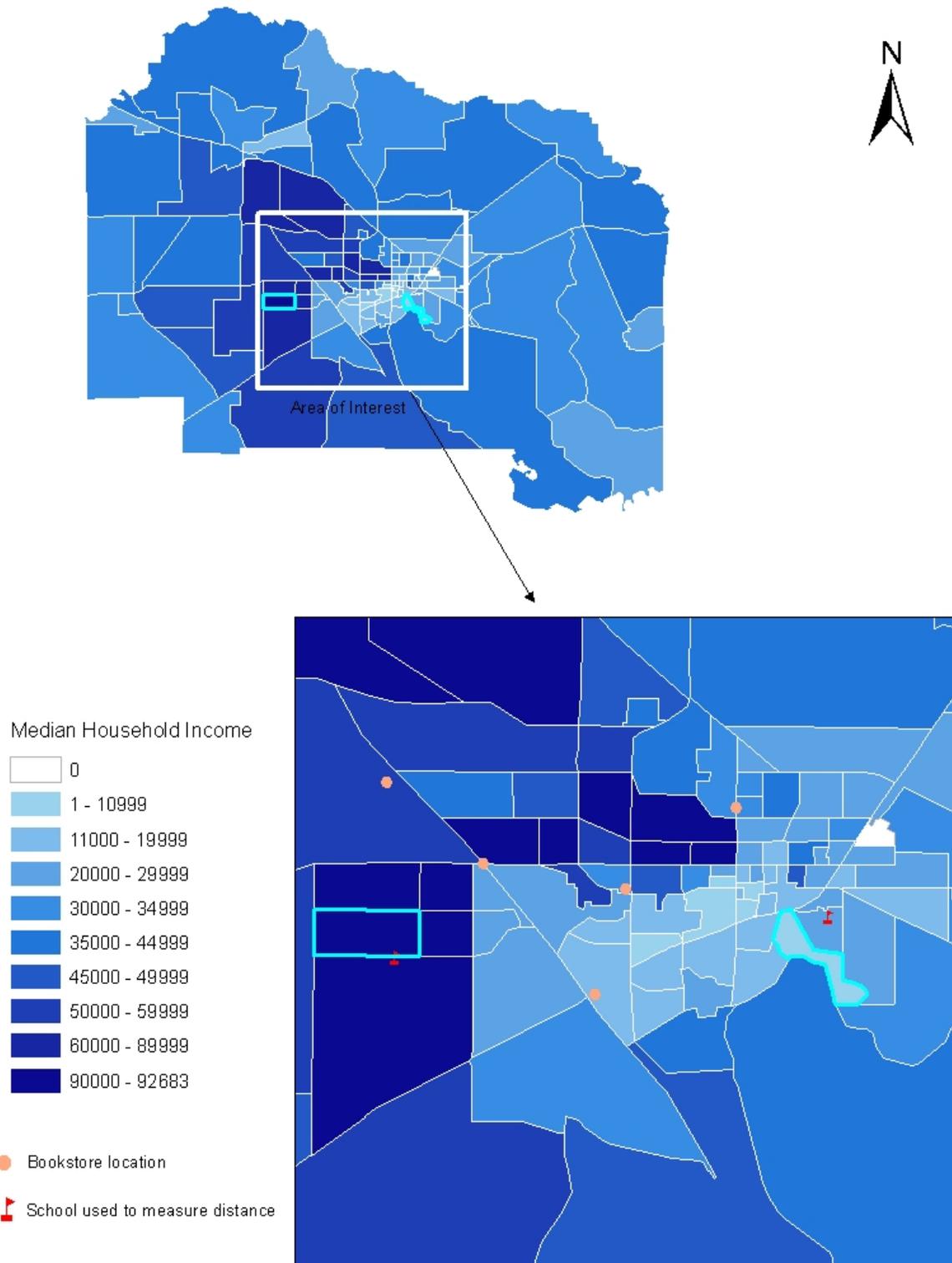


Figure 4-1. Map of Gainesville by median household income with bookstore locations.

CHAPTER 5 COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

The Alachua County Library District is a library system composed of the headquarters location, nine other branches, and two bookmobiles. The headquarters building and two of the branches are located inside Gainesville city limits, and one of the bookmobiles also serves Gainesville. The children's sections at these three branches were very similar. All had sizable collections with at least four thousand books, and all had children's chairs and tables. Some of the children's areas also included area rugs with the alphabet on it and adult seating in addition to the children's chairs. For this study, the distance from the poorest and wealthiest areas to each branch within city limits was determined. In addition to traveling distance, it is also important to consider accessibility via public transportation to each location, and the bookmobile that serves Gainesville will be discussed in more detail as well. A map of Gainesville by median household income with the library locations is available in Figure 5-1.

The Headquarters location is less than a block from the main downtown bus stop. Routes 1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 11, 15, 24, and 43 all make stops at the downtown plaza Monday–Friday. All of these routes except for 43 also run on Saturday. Routes 400, 401, 403, 406, and 407 make stops on Sunday. This library is open from 9:30am until 9pm Monday–Thursday, 9:30am–6pm on Friday, 9:30–5 on Saturday, and 1pm–5pm on Sunday. Traveling distance from the poorer area is 1.15 miles, and it was 9.45 miles from the wealthier area. As discussed previously, route 2 provides service to the poorest neighborhood, and the Library headquarters is the closest book location to this neighborhood. Route 406 provides access on Sundays. Again, no bus route provides service to the wealthiest area.

The Millhopper branch is on route 43, which runs every hour from 6:05am until 6:05pm Monday through Friday. No service is provided on Saturday or Sunday. The branch is open

9:30am–8:30pm Monday-Wednesday, 9:30am–6pm on Thursday, 9:30am–5pm Friday and Saturday, and 1pm–5pm on Sunday. Traveling distance from the two schools is similar—it is 7.26 from the poorer neighborhood and 8 miles from the wealthier neighborhood. Residents from the poorest area could access this branch during weekdays by transferring to route 43 from the downtown plaza. It could not be accessed on the weekends by bus.

The Tower Road branch can be accessed by route 75. This branch is open on Monday from 9:30am to 6pm, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 9:30am to 8:30pm, on Fridays and Saturdays from 9:30am to 5pm, and on Sundays from 1pm to 5pm. This location is closer to the wealthier neighborhood, with a traveling distance of 1.9 miles. The traveling distance from the poorer neighborhood is 12.73 miles, and it would be challenging to access this branch by bus. Residents would have to take route 2 to the downtown plaza and then take route 1 or 5 to make a connection with route 75. No bus provides service on Sunday (RTS 2007).

There is also a bookmobile that serves Gainesville. It is geared mostly toward children, as children tend to use it more than adults. There are over one thousand children's books on the bookmobile, and children can either browse for books to check out or reserve a specific book and ask it to be placed on the bookmobile for them. The bookmobile has a schedule based on a four week month and visits most stops at least twice a month. There are twenty stops that the bookmobile makes in Gainesville, but only several of those are located close to poorest area of town. No stops are located in the wealthiest area. Stops 1, 5, 8, and 20 all serve the surrounding area of the poorest neighborhood. The stops are depicted in Figure 5-2, which is a map of Gainesville by median household income with the bookmobile stops. Stops 1 and 20 occur on the first and third Wednesday of the month, and the bookmobile stops for an hour and a half in the afternoon at each location. The bookmobile visits stop 5 the first, second, third, and fourth

Monday of the month and the visit lasts from 1:00 until 7:00pm. Stop 8 is visited the first and third Thursday of the month and the bookmobile is there from 2:00 until 4:00 in the afternoon.

Funding. It is important to consider the way library systems and library branches are funded in that if funding is unequal, there will be differences in the amount of resources available to serve different populations. As can be seen with public schools, funding differences often lead to unequal resources. Thus, funding is one major consideration when exploring the availability of books by different economic neighborhoods.

The Alachua County Library system is funded from a variety of sources. A large portion of funding is received through property taxes, but there is also a state aid program that offers additional funding. There is also a foundation that offers the library a source of ongoing income and there are a number of grants that have allowed the library to purchase computers and to help coordinate literacy services. The Friends of the Library also helps through semi-annual sales and special fund purchases. All of the book collections are based centrally, and the branches receive funding based on need.

Policies, Procedures, and Programs. There are several unique aspects of the Alachua County Library system that enhance the ability of young children and their families to access books. There is an overall awareness of the need to increase reading to young children and a dedication to help that happen. This is evidenced through the building of Snuggle Up Centers, the plans for a new library on the east side of Gainesville, the customization of specific programs and policies to meet clientele needs, and the collaboration with a number of community agencies. While not all of these specifically target children before they enter school, they do advertise the importance of reading to children and the need to have books easily accessible.

Snuggle Up Centers are located inside library branches and other community centers and offer a place for children to play while their parents obtain information on child development and education. Previously, the adult information and the child-friendly environment were two separate places, but Snuggle Up Centers are bringing the two together. They are being built through partnerships with the Alachua County Library District, the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, and the United Way of North Central Florida.

In an interview with the library director, plans for a new library on the east side of town were mentioned. While planning is still in its early stages and land has not even been purchased yet, it was clear that a new branch on the east side of town was the next large project for the library district. It was also evident that the clientele was being taken into consideration in the planning; for example, access to public transportation was mentioned as a major factor in deciding on a location. In addition, a possible location would be by the Health Department, a location that many families have to visit. If the library was built next to that existing facility, which already incorporated a bus route, then families could visit the Health Department and the library in one trip.

The library recognizes the needs of its clientele beyond the planning stages of new branches. For instance, one of the county libraries has a large number of patrons who are Spanish-speaking migrant workers, so that library branch makes an effort to have more books in Spanish. In addition, library personnel often visit nearby daycares and have rotating collections in local YMCAs. One of the most interesting attempts to reach out to the youth is through an incomplete application. Usually, a parent is required to sign on a child's library card application to assume financial responsibility for lost books. However, under an incomplete application, children can go to the library and check out up to two books at a time. This is seen as a "good

investment” by the library, in that even if they lose money on a lost or stolen book, it is probably in the hands of a child who needs it.

The library district works with many other community agencies. As already mentioned, the Snuggle Up Centers are being built through partnerships with the United Way and the Early Learning Coalition. In addition, the library reaches out to youth through a variety of outlets, including daycare centers, YMCA programs, and local farmer’s markets. There are two other community programs that the library is involved in that are worth noting. One is the creation of Welcome Baby Kits, which are packages given to new parents when they give birth to their baby. The package includes a free book and a coupon for another free book, redeemable at any Alachua county library. The project is funded by the United Way’s Success by 6 program as well as the Friends of the Library (Welcome Baby Kits 2006). Another important program is HIPPY, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters. This program is designed to reach low income families and parents with limited education, and it involves trained parent-educators serving families who live in their communities. Through involvement with these programs and the library’s partnerships with other organizations, there is a clear awareness of the importance of reading to children, even before they enter school.

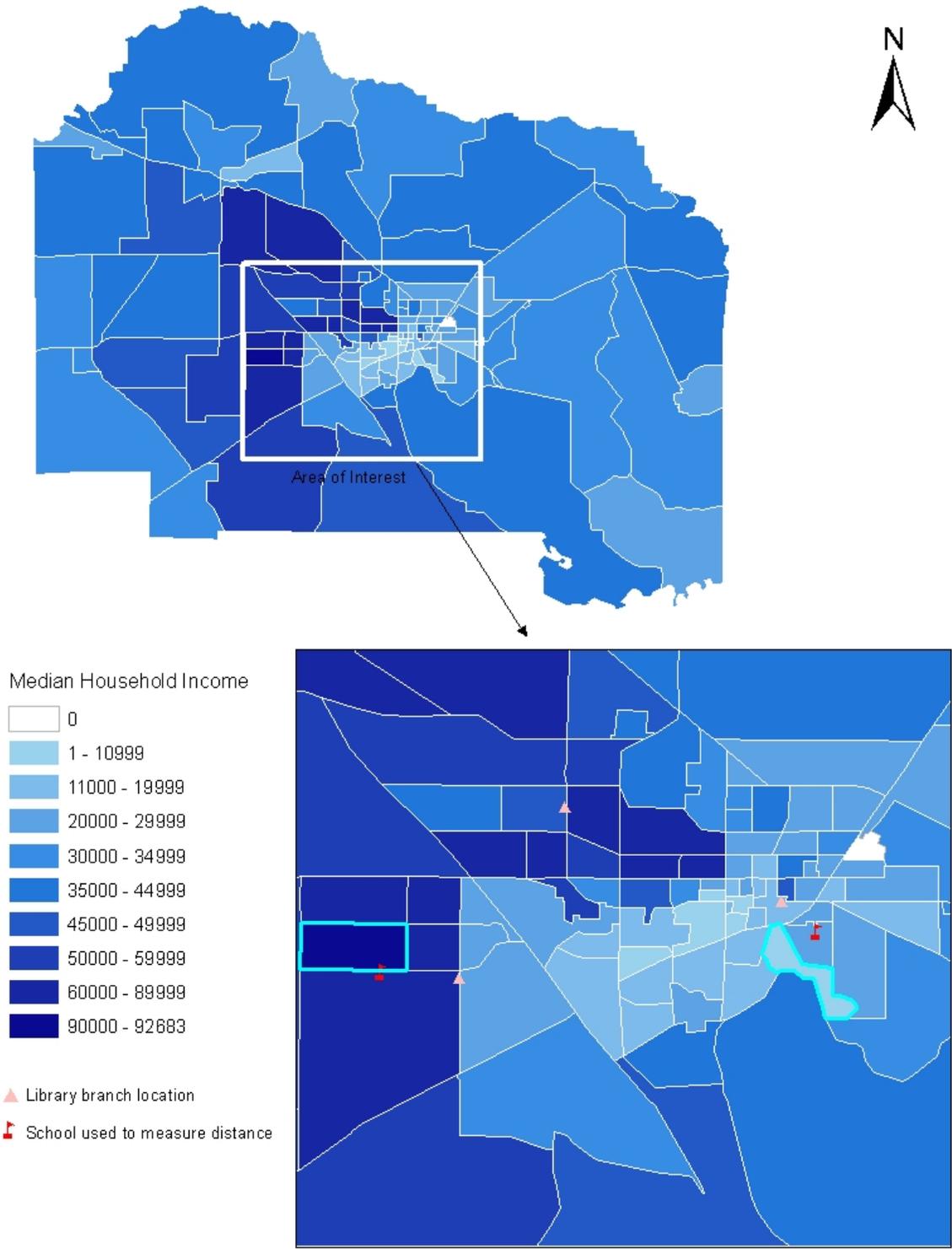


Figure 5-1. Map of Gainesville by median household income with library branch locations.

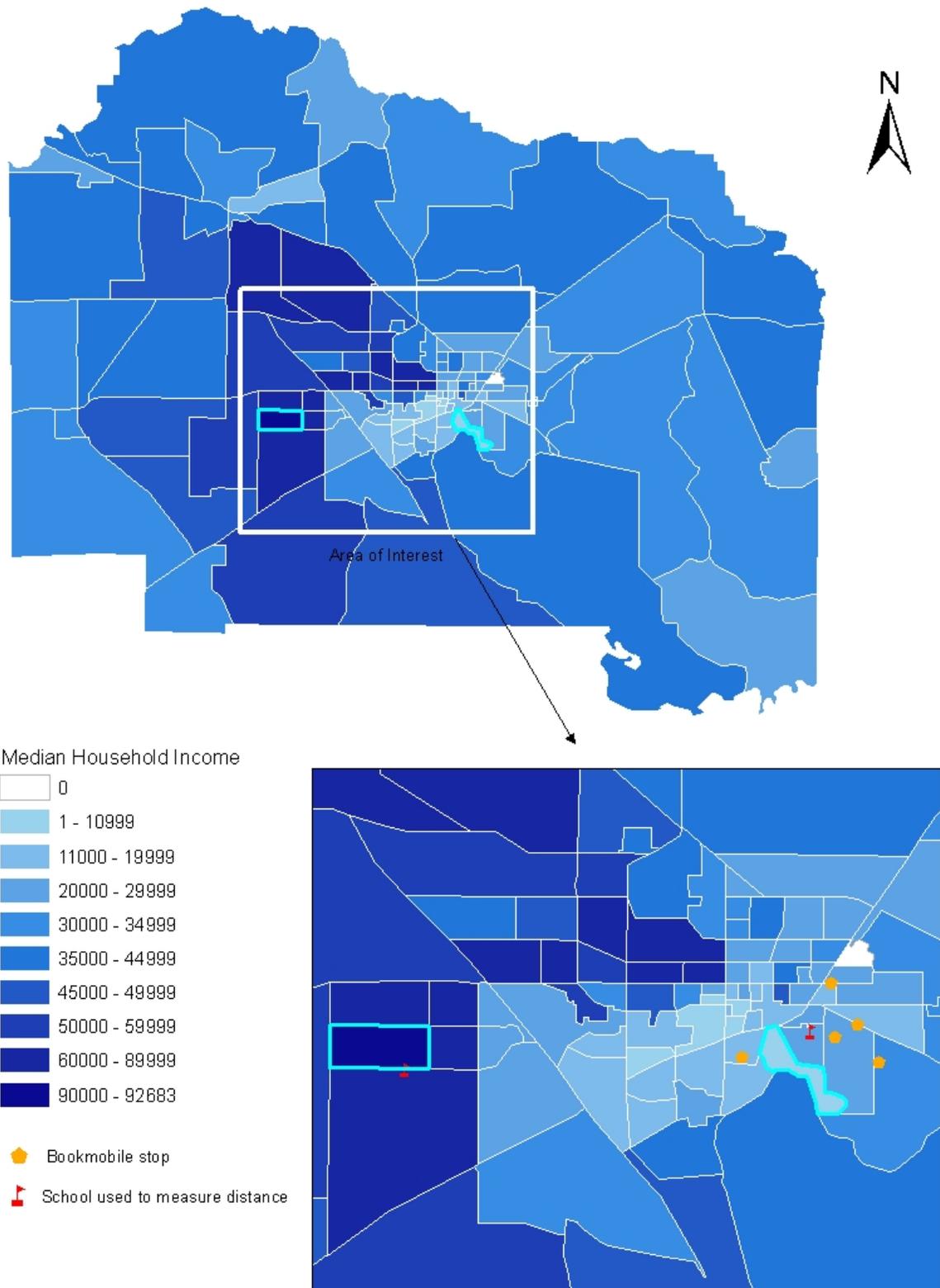


Figure 5-2. Map of Gainesville by median household income with bookmobile stops.

CHAPTER 6 DENSITY OF CHILDREN

While it is helpful to examine the location of books in relation to economic neighborhoods, it is also important to look at the location of books in regard to the target population, young children. Using data from the 2000 Census, the number of children aged four and younger in each block group was determined, and this number was divided by the total population of that block group to calculate the proportion of children. Block group 2 in census tract 6 had the highest percentage of children, with 6.6% of the population being aged four or younger. This block group is near to census tract 7, which included the block that was the poorest neighborhood in Gainesville. Therefore, the distances to the location of books are very similar to those already presented. Figures 6-1, 6-2, and 6-3 are maps of Gainesville by child density with the locations of the bookstores, library branches, and bookmobile stops, respectively. The library headquarters is the closest location, being only 1.76 miles away. The Books-A-Million and Goerings bookstores are the next closest, followed by Barnes and Noble and the Millhopper library branch. Waldenbooks is 11.78 miles away, and the Tower Road library branch and the Gainesville Book Company are both roughly 14 miles away. The library headquarters is the only book location that would be directly accessible from the neighborhood with the highest percentage of children, and all other locations except for the Gainesville Book Company could be accessed by transferring to different routes. However, bookmobile stop 7 directly serves the neighborhood with the highest density of children. The bookmobile stops at this location on the first and third Wednesday of the month and is there from 5:00 until 6:30 in the evening. Thus, the bookmobile and Headquarters branch provide the most direct access to children's books for families in the neighborhood with the highest density of children.

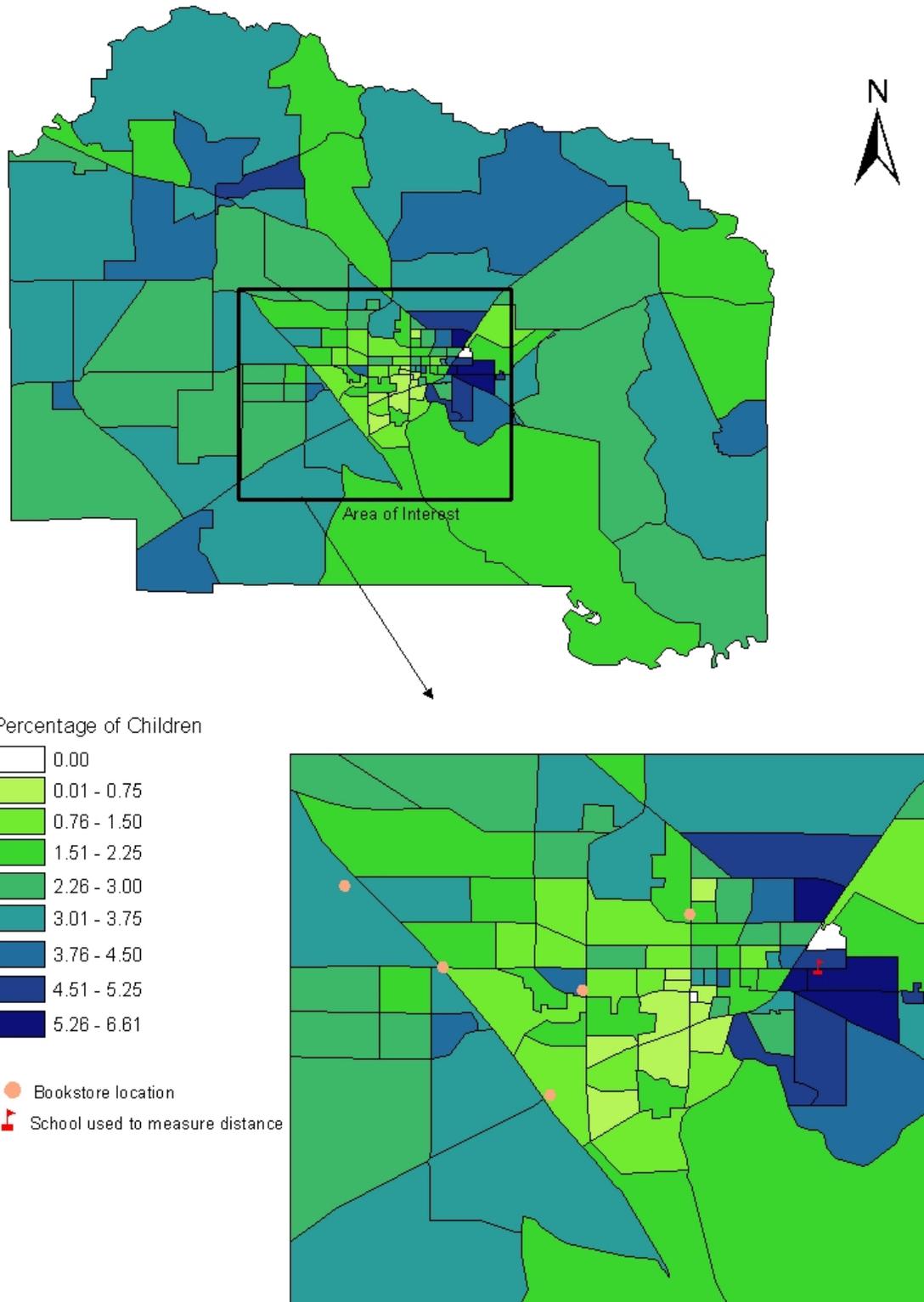


Figure 6-1. Map of Gainesville by child density with bookstore locations.

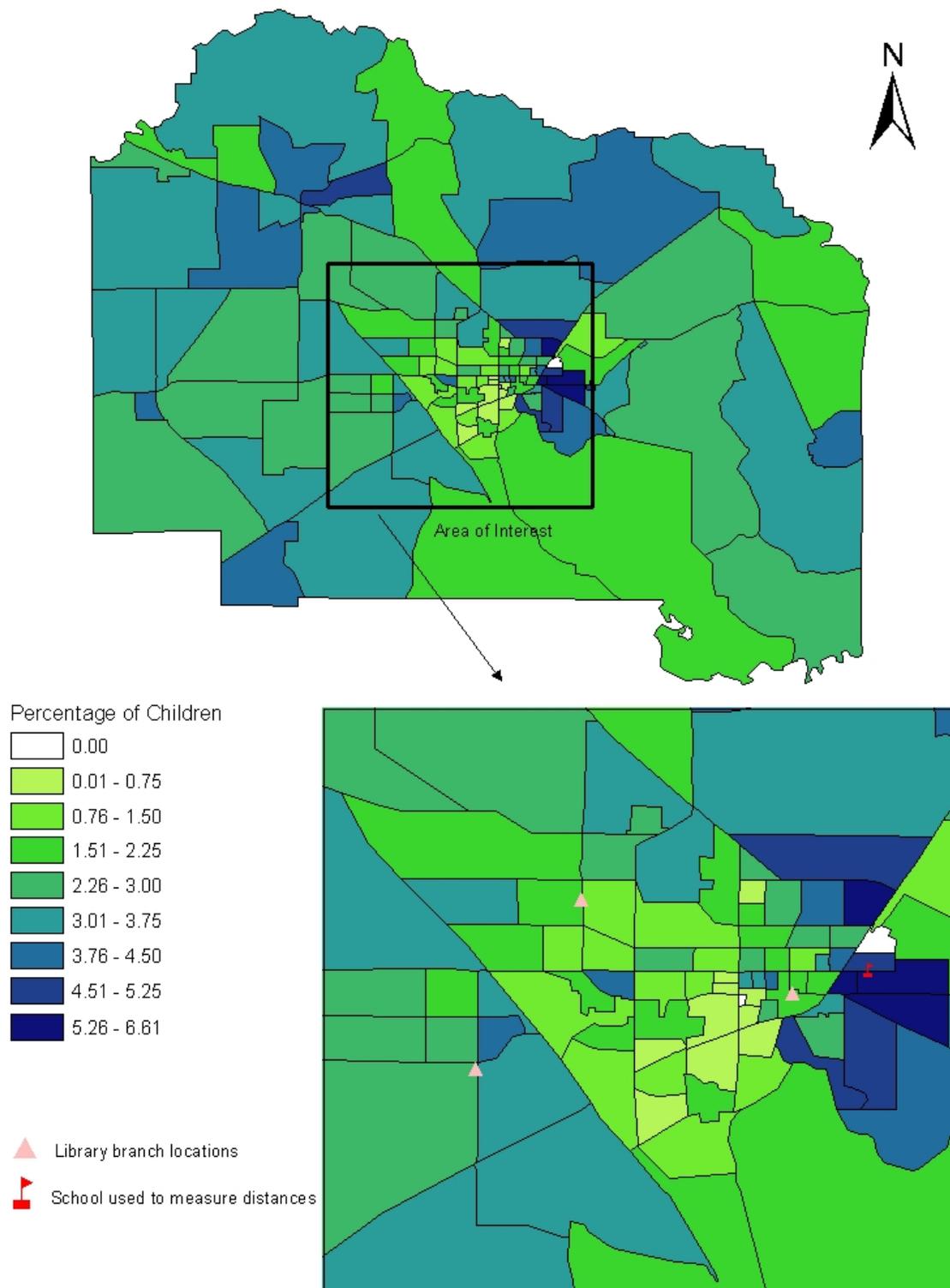


Figure 6-2. Map of Gainesville by child density with library branch locations.

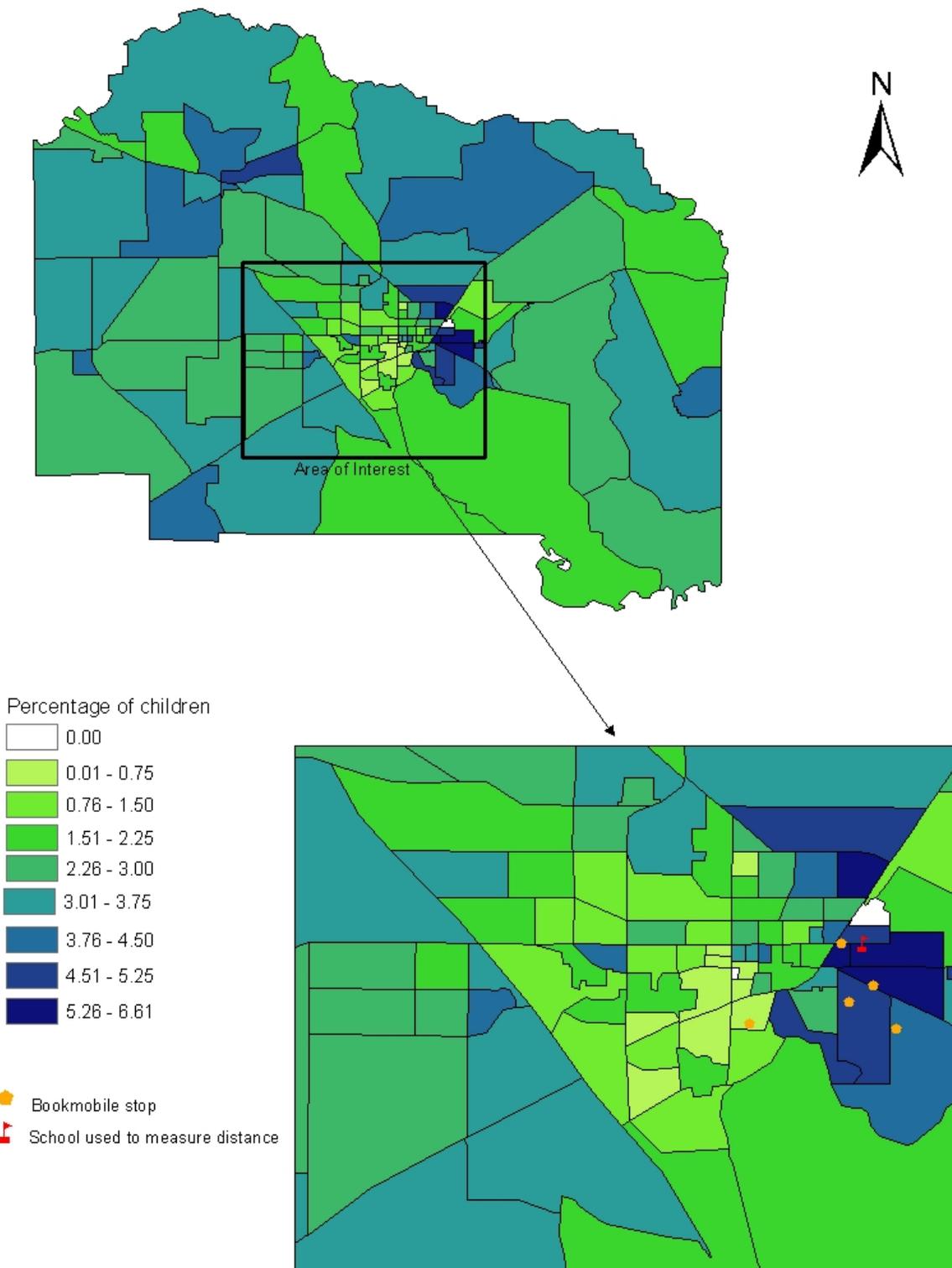


Figure 6-3. Map of Gainesville by child density with bookmobile stops.

CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined if there are differences in the accessibility of children's books across neighborhoods that vary by household income. Reading to children before they enter school offers numerous developmental benefits, and previous research has shown that parental educational attainment, race, and economic status are associated with different amounts of shared reading. Given the immense importance of reading to children and the inequality seen in the amount of shared reading, it is imperative to ensure that every child and their family can access age appropriate books.

This study found that, overall, children's books are available to families in both the poorest and the wealthiest neighborhoods. However, this overall generalization has several restrictions. The wealthiest area has five book locations within six miles, including four bookstores and one library. The poorest neighborhood has three book locations within six miles, including two bookstores and one library. However, one of these bookstores has only a limited children's section and the narrowest price range. It is interesting to note that the used bookstore, which had the least expensive books, was completely unavailable via public transportation and was the furthest book location from the poorer neighborhood.

Public transportation was more accessible to residents of the poorer area. No bus route provides service to the wealthiest neighborhood, but public transportation is less of a necessity in this area because there is a higher proportion of vehicles (Census 2000). However, the presence of public transportation does not mean the system is user-friendly. For instance, the Headquarters library is the only book location that could be reached from the poorest neighborhood via public transportation without transferring to another route. In addition, the

route that does provide access to the poorest neighborhood runs once an hour, which could be an obstacle to accessing books via public transportation.

It is important to note the pivotal role of the library system in this analysis. Without the Headquarters location, there would be a much more substantial difference in the accessibility of books across economic neighborhoods. The bookmobile, with its focus on serving low-income neighborhoods, further enhances the accessibility of books by all children. It is logical that bookstores as businesses will be located where there are customers, but the Alachua County Library System has done, and continues to do, a good job of ensuring that all families have access to children's books.

To create a comprehensive analysis, other factors that were beyond the scope of this study must also be taken into consideration. For instance, parents or caregivers might not be aware of the importance of reading to children or might not be able to read themselves. Low-income parents might work multiple jobs and be unable to take the time to ride the bus to get to a bookstore or library. In addition, income data gathered by the Census does not include homeless or migrant children, and this study did not explore the type or quality of children's books at each location. Some families might not be able to read in English and might read to their children if books in their native language, such as Spanish, were available.

These limitations offer numerous routes for further research. Studies should address how frequently people from different economic areas use libraries and bookstores to attain children's books. While this study found that books were for the most part available, this does not address whether or not they are used. In addition, community programs should be included in an analysis of access to children's books; effectiveness and the number of families reached would be important factors to consider. Lastly, future studies should explore the quality and diversity

of books at each location. Reading to children is an important issue, and it is much more complex than the mere accessibility of books. Accessibility is an essential part of reading with children, but it is only the first step in analyzing if all children and their families have the opportunity to read together.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Butler Plaza. Retrieved January 2007, from <http://www.butlerplaza.com/about.asp>
- Cullinan, B. (1977). Books in the life of young children. In B.E. Cullinan & C.W. Carmichael (Eds.), *Literature and Young Children*. (pp. 1-4). Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Flores, G., Tomany-Korman, S.C., & Olson, L. (2005, February). Does disadvantage start at home? *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.*, 159, 158-165.
- Fox, M. (1993, May). Politics and literature: chasing the “isms” from children’s books. *The Reading Teacher*, 46, 8, 654-658.
- High, P., Hopmann, M., LaGasse, L., Sege, R., Moran, J., Guitierrez, C., & Becker, S. (1999). Child centered literacy orientation: a form of social capital. *Pediatrics*. 103;55
- Holliday, K.N. (1998, September). Modeling divergent thinking through picture books. *Roeper Review*, 21(1), A-5-A-6.
- Honig, A.S. & Shin, M. (2001). Reading aloud with infants and toddlers in child care settings: an observational study. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 28(3), 193-197.
- Mahoney, E. & Wilcox, L. (1985). *Ready, Set, Read: Best Books to Prepare Preschoolers* Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Meador, K. (1998, September). Models of divergent behavior: characters in children’s picture books. *Roeper Review*, 21(1), A-1-A-5.
- National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). (2003). Retrieved November 2006, from <http://nces.ed.gov/NAAL/index.asp?file=AboutNAAL/WhatIsNAAL.asp&PageId=2>
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2003). Reading-young children’s achievement and classroom experiences. Findings from the Condition of Education 2003.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2006). Retrieved November 2006, from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=56>
- Morrison, J., & Bordere, T. (2001) . Supporting Biracial Children’s Identity Development. *Childhood Education*, 77(3).
- Paterson, S., & Lach, M. (1990). Gender Stereotypes in Children’s Books: Their Prevalence and Influence on Cognitive and Affective Development. *Gender & Education*, 2(2), 185-198.
- Pinsent, Pat. *Children’s literature and the politics of equality*
- Regional Transit System. (2006). Final City of Gainesville Regional Transit City Transit Development Plan FY 2007-FY20. Retrieved February 2007, from http://www.gorts.com/pdf/2007/TDP_FY2007-11/TDP_FY2007-11_Final.pdf

- Regional Transit System. (2007). City & Campus Bus Schedule January 1, 2007 – April 29, 2007.
- Rogers, T. (1999). Literary theory and children's literature: interpreting ourselves and our worlds. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(3), 138-146.
- Senechal, M., LeFevre, J., Hudson, E., & Lawson, E.P. (1996, September) Knowledge of storybooks as a predictor of young children's vocabulary. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, No 3, 520-536.
- Senechal, M., Cornell, E. (1993). Vocabulary acquisition through shared reading experiences. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 28(4), 360-374.
- Senechal, M., LeFevre, J. (2001). Storybook reading and parent teaching: links to language and literacy development. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*. No. 92.
- Tolson, N. (1998). Making books available: the role of early libraries, librarians, and booksellers in the promotion of African American children's literature. *African American Review*, 32(1).
- U.S. Census Bureau. Fact Sheet. Gainesville city, Florida. Retrieved February 2007, from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=01000US&_geoContext=01000US&_street=&_county=Gainesville&_cityTown=Gainesville&_state=04000US12&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=geoSelect&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=ACS_2005_SAFF&_ci_nbr=null&q_r_name=null®=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry=
- Welcome Baby Kits. (2006). Alachua County Library District. News Archives. Retrieved February 2007 from http://www.acld.lib.fl.us/index.php?site_area=about_the_library&page=news&item=00093
- Whitehurst, G.J., Falco, F.L, Lonigan, C.J., Fischel, J.E., DeBaryshe, B.D, Valdez-Menchaca, M.C., & Caulfield, M. (1988, July). Accelerating language development through picture book reading. *Developmental Psychology*, 24(4) 552-559.
- Wright, C., Diener, M., & Kay, S. (2000). School readiness of low-income children at risk for school failure. *Journal of Children & Poverty*, 6(2) 99-117.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeanne Holcomb was born on April 25, 1983. The youngest of three children, she grew up mostly in St. Joseph, Missouri and Atlanta, Georgia. She graduated from Bishop Moore High School in Orlando, Florida, and continued her education at the University of Florida. After receiving a B.S. in psychology and a B.A. in sociology, Jeanne entered the sociology graduate program at the University of Florida. After completing the M.A. degree, she will continue in the program to obtain the Ph.D. degree.

Jeanne's studies are based on the idea that meaningful change can only occur when there is an in-depth knowledge of the social problem. It is imperative to analyze both macro and micro factors, to look at social institutions as well as the individual. It is only when all levels are taken into consideration that a greater understanding can be achieved.

Jeanne and her husband, Greg, were married in 2005. They have a daughter, Claire, who was born in 2007 and brings them much joy and happiness. Jeanne is also fortunate to have supportive parents, in-laws, brothers, and sisters-in-law. Her studies would not be possible without the support and encouragement of all of her family!