

DISCUSSION

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These two papers include one written by a government economist, who is seriously concerned with the evaluation of governmental expenditures which are designed to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty from our society. The second paper represents a rather cynical view of the ability of any governmental agency, or for that matter, any academic institution to carry out such an evaluation program. What I am not certain about is whether or not Mr. Levitan includes private research institutions in his concern of bias in evaluation.

I think one of the most significant points made by Mr. Levine is his suggestion that "every program and every experiment should include an evaluation design from the start". I would only stress that not only should an evaluation design be included, but care should be taken that the action program should itself be planned so as to provide for program evaluation. This does not mean that the action program should be subordinated to the evaluation efforts, but it does mean that with some minor adjustments in an action program we can develop a better evaluation design. In other words, both the program and the evaluation design should be evolved jointly between the director of the action program and the program evaluator.

I am also impressed by the fact that Mr. Levine is concerned with what we might call external or spillover benefits. This is an area which requires a good deal of work. I might point out that currently we at The Pennsylvania State University are conducting a cost-benefit study with respect to vocational education. We are also taking into account the benefits which may accrue to society because of vocational education programs. We are interested in determining whether or not the benefits "spill over" and reduce, say, unemployment, alleviate public assistance, etc. This analysis requires further investigation.

It is, of course, quite easy to be critical of cost-benefit studies. It is easy to set up the ideal type of study, but the real problem is to carry out an actual study. One encounters many problems in administering a project of this type. There is not a single cost-benefit study conducted by economists with which I am familiar, where one does not find a full awareness and recognition of the limitations of such a study. All we can hope for is that each successive project will make an additional contribution to the methodology and procedures. I would, however, like to make two comments with respect to Mr. Levine's reference to cost-benefit studies. He indicates that certain types of training programs may be justified even if the costs are higher than estimated benefits. What he implies is that there are other objectives besides earnings which should be taken into account. All I would suggest is that we be very conscious of these costs in relation to the benefits, to be sure that

these costs justify the non-economic objectives. Surely, we would not advocate infinite costs if we wanted to achieve these non-economic objectives. I think it is possible to take care of every poor person in the United States by giving him personal training, personal guidance, and personal assistance in obtaining a job. What we must consider is the alternative use of these funds for other programs, rather than simply to compare the costs and benefits of a given program.

In this connection, I would point out that a comparison of the costs and benefits for youth enrolled in the Job Corps and those enrolled in the Neighborhood Youth Corps is still not complete. It is true that we could justify the heavy investment in youngsters enrolled in the Job Corps on the assumption that the Neighborhood Youth Corps could not meet his needs, but we might examine the question of whether or not extra expenditures in the area of public assistance, which would permit a better home life, might not in the long run prevent youngsters from becoming eligible for enrollment in the Job Corps. In other words, it might be cheaper to spend more money for public assistance, which in turn might be more costly than the Neighborhood Youth Corps, but still less costly than the Job Corps. What I would suggest here is that the Office of Economic Opportunity consider not only the alternatives within its own program, but also the alternatives with other programs which are outside of its jurisdiction.

In connection with community action programs, Mr. Levine indicates the difficulty in evaluating expenditures for this type of activity. I would agree that it is much too early to make any evaluation of this type of program, and that for the first few years we shall be confronted with vast costs involved simply in the creation of an administrative agency.

We, at Penn State, are just completing a study of a community action program involving 31 small communities in the so-called Mon-Yough Region of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania. The final report is to be submitted to the governmental agency which financed this study by September 1, 1966. We find that there are really four stages in the development of a community action program. The first can be designated as the aspirational period, when a number of people define an area's economic problem and set forth certain aspirations in connection with it. The second stage is really the mobilizing stage, when the founders of the community action program begin to include other groups in the community to participate in a community action program. The third stage, which can be called the mobilizing phase, is really the incorporation or establishment of an actual agency which will conduct various community action programs. The fourth phase can be described as the synthesizing phase, namely, that stage during which the community action program unites the vari-

ous organizations in the community for the purpose of developing specific programs.

It might be pointed out that the area with which we were concerned consists of 31 small communities and is not concerned with a large city. It is clear that the process by which community action programs can be developed is unusually slow. Although Mr. Levine indicates the necessity of on-sight inspections of these programs, I would suggest that it would take a team of skilled specialists in economics and sociology for evaluation to maintain close contact with these programs and study them almost on a day to day basis for long periods of time.

Mr. Levine reveals, and correctly so, a concern for the weakness in program evaluation in the field of education. One of the reasons he ascribes for this weakness is the decentralization of the operations of the various educational programs. In Pennsylvania, we have begun to develop some close relationships with the Department of Public Instruction, and we are in the process of developing a series of research projects which will be concerned primarily with program evaluation of the types that the O.E.O. is conducting in the field of training and education. I would like to suggest that the development of a relationship between a University and a state agency, and even local school districts, may be the way in which we can develop better procedures for evaluating educational programs throughout the country.

Needless to say, everyone would agree with Mr. Levitan's concern over the need for making objective studies of governmental programs. The only problem is that on the basis of his stand-

ards it would be exceedingly difficult to find any institution, public or private, which is devoid of any influence by a granting agency. The fact is that if we are to carry on program evaluations of the types that Mr. Levine suggests, such projects become very costly. The alternative is to allow an independent scholar in an academic community, using essentially his own funds, to conduct such evaluations. But this type of research is not particularly fruitful, as it lacks any scientific basis. I think that Mr. Levitan would look favorably on this type of research, but I would enter a strong dissent. In fact, some of the suggestions of Mr. Levitan would not meet the current requirements for adequate program evaluation. I think he has a misconception of the role and use of model building and quantitative analysis. I am in favor of good research that is done by good researchers. I do not care to defend bad research carried on by bad researchers.

One final comment. I think that Mr. Levitan's concern about too great a reliance by academic researchers on government funds is considerably exaggerated. None of us is pure. We are all subject to various kinds of influences, but I must say that our substantial experience during the past several years, in which we have carried on research projects under grants from the Federal government, reveals that the influence is virtually nil.

I would suggest that in view of the fact funds for research are available from a variety of sources and as long as several scholars tackle the same problem, we can minimize the influence of the grantor on the grantee.