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ABSTRACT

The historical, political and economic climate in the mid-1960's was ripe for a head-on collision between two conflicting ideologies. On the one hand, there was President Johnson's War on Poverty. The Head Start summer programs were begun in late 1964 as the archetype of the hope to improve the lives of the poor. On the other hand, was the implementation of the Planning, Programming, Budgeting System (PPBS) by the Federal Government under the premise that thorough analysis could produce a flow of information that would greatly improve the basis for decision making. Evaluation was fundamental to the thinking of PPBS. The clash between methodology, political forces, and bureaucracy loomed fearfully in those early days. Many individual project evaluations were undertaken mainly focusing on the summer programs, although a number of full-year programs had now been funded. This was the context in which the Westinghouse Study was given the task of assessing, in a reasonably short time, the overall effectiveness of the total program. The results caused a great stir because they showed the program to be "ineffectual" over the long term. The methodological and conceptual validity are the explicit focal point of the controversy. However, after reviewing the major criticism, an overall assessment of the methodological and conceptual base indicates that the study is a "relatively" good one and does provide useful information for decision making. (CK)

July 14, 1969

The Politics of Evaluation: The Case of Head Start*

By

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Prepared for Annals of American Academy of Political Science

A far-reaching controversy has flared over a recent Westinghouse Learning Corporation-Ohio University evaluation study showing that Head Start children now in the first, second, and third grades differed little on a series of academic achievement and attitudinal measures from comparable children who did not attend Head Start.

In the heat of the public controversy there have been some old-fashioned political innuendos of vile motives, but in the main the principal weapons in the battle have been the esoteric paraphernalia of modern statistical analysis. This is appropriate; the methodological validity of the Head Start study is a critical piece of the debate. However, the real battle is not over the methodological purity of this particular study but rather involves fundamental issues of how the Federal Government will develop large-scale programs and evaluate their results.

At this deeper level of the debate, what we are seeing is a head-on collision between two sets of ideas developed in the mid-1960's. On the one hand, there was the implicit premise of the early War on Poverty years that effective programs could be launched full-scale, and yield significant improvements in the lives of the poor. Head Start was the archetype of this hope. Born in late 1964, the program was serving over a half million children by the end of the following summer. On the other hand, during roughly the same period the Federal Government implemented the Planning, Programming, Budgeting System (PPBS) founded on the premise that rigorous analysis could produce a flow of information that would greatly improve the basis for decision making. And, the

notion of evaluating both ongoing programs and new program ideas was fundamental to this type of thinking.

To see the dimensions and ramifications of this clash, it is necessary to return to those halcyon days in which the basic ideas of the War on Poverty and PPBS were formulated. Only then can we explore the present Head Start controversy to see what we may learn from it for the future.

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE WAR ON POVERTY

On June 4, 1965, President Johnson said in his Howard University Address, entitled "To Fulfill These Rights":

> To move beyond opportunity to achievement....
>
> I pledge you tonight this will be a chief goal of my administration, and of my program next year, and in years to come. And I hope, and I pray, and I believe, it will be a part of the program of all America....
>
> It is the glorious opportunity of this generation to end the one huge wrong of the American Nation and, in so doing, to find America for ourselves, with the same immense thrill of discovery which gripped those who first began to realize that here, at last, was a home for freedom.

The speech rang with hope--a call for basic changes that seemed well within our grasp. Viewed from the present, the address marked a distinct watershed. It was the crest of our domestic tranquility, with the strong belief that as a Nation, black and white could work together in harmony. The speech also marked the high point of our faith in our ability to bring about significant change. Despite some of the rhetoric of the time to the effect that change would not be easy,

it is fair to say that the faith was there that giant steps could be taken quickly. On that June day there was the strong belief that the concentrated effort of the War on Poverty, launched less than a year before, could bind together the Nation.

This faith had two dimensions--first that there could be a redistribution of funds and power toward the disadvantaged and second that with such a redistribution new programs could bring substantial improvement in the lot of the disadvantaged. The first was both more clearly perceived and more glamorous. To wrest power and money from the entrenched forces was heady stuff. Less clearly perceived was that redistribution was a necessary but not a sufficient condition of progress. New programs had to be devised, not just in broad brush strokes, but in the nitty gritty detail of techniques and organization. Taking young black men from the ghettos to the wilderness of an isolated Job Corp Center was not a solution in itself. One had to worry about such mundane things as curriculum, handling these young men in a Spartan, female-absent environment, etc. This atmosphere of confidence and enthusiasm led us to push aside the fact that we had neither the benefit of experience in such programs nor much of a realization of the difficulties involved in developing effective techniques.

Standing on the battle-scarred ground of the War on Poverty in 1969, it is easy to see the naivete and innocence of the time scarcely half a decade ago. Events were to crash upon us quickly. Vietnam was to end any hope for big money. The riots, militancy, and the rise of separatism made the earlier ideas of harmony seem quaint. Those with established power yielded easily neither to moral suasion nor more

forceful means. Real power is still a well-guarded commodity.

Most important for this discussion, we have found over a wide range of social action programs both how unyielding the causes of poverty are and how little we really know about workable techniques for helping the disadvantaged. The point is not that we are unable to derive "reasonable" programs from bits and pieces of information and hard thinking. We can, we have. But, our experience seems to point up over and over again the almost insurmountable difficulty of bridging the gap between brilliantly conceived programs and those which work in the field. Great pressures exist for new "solutions" to social problems to be rushed into national implementation as soon as they are conceived; but the attempts to go directly from sound ideas to full-scale programs seem so often to end in frustration and disappointment.

THE ORIGINS OF ANALYSIS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT

In the early 1960's Secretary Robert McNamara relied on a conceptual framework formulated at the RAND Corporation to make analysis a critical factor in the Department of Defense decision-making process. In October 1965, drawing on this experience, the Bureau of the Budget issued Bulletin No. 66-3 establishing the Planning, Programming, Budgeting System within all Federal departments and agencies. The Departments and agencies were instructed to "establish an adequate central staff or staffs for analysis, planning, and programming [with] ....the head of the central analytical staff....directly responsible to the head of the agency or his deputy." These central offices were to be interposed between the head of the agency and the operating programs and charged

with undertaking analysis that would provide a hard quantitative base from which to make decisions. For social action agencies this was a radical change in the way of doing business.

Before PPBS, not much progress had been made in analyzing social action programs. While the broad approach developed at the Department of Defense could be carried over, the relevance of particular methodological tools was less clear. In the case of effectiveness evaluations which seek to measure the effects of a program on its participants or the external world there was little actual experience for social action programs. And a host of formidable problems existed such as the lack of good operational definitions for key variables, the shortage of adequate test instruments, the difficulties of developing valid control groups, etc. Thus, for social action programs the usefulness of evaluative analysis would have to be proved in particular situations.

Beyond this was the political question of bringing analysis into the agency policy process. As analytical studies were quite new to social action programs, their results--especially those measuring the effectiveness of ongoing programs--were seen as a threat by those with established decision-making positions. For unfavorable evaluation results have a potential for either restricting program funds or forcing major changes in program direction. One can hardly assume passsive acceptance of such an outcome by program managers and operators.

Thus, here one can see the tiny dark cloud of the Head Start controversy forming at this early date. For the push toward new operating programs and the emerging PPB system presented a role conflict between those who ran programs (and believed in them) and those who analyzed these programs (and whose job it was to be skeptical of them). As the former Director of the Bureau of the Budget, Charles L. Schultze has observed:

> . . . It is this relationship between the political process and the decision-making process as envisaged by PPB that I wish to examine. I do not believe that there is an irreconcilable conflict between the two systems. But they are different kinds of systems representing different ways of arriving at decisions. The two systems are so closely interrelated that PPB and its associated analytic method can be an effective tool for aiding decisions only when its relationships with the political process have been carefully articulated and the appropriate roles of each defined . . . .
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> . . . It may, indeed, be necessary to guard against the naivete of the systems analyst who ignores political constraints and believes that efficiency alone produces virtue. But it is equally necessary to guard against the naivete of the decision maker who ignores resource constraints and believes that virtue alone produces efficiency. [1]

Looking at the early PPBS in retrospect vis-a-vis social action programs, it may be said that: (1) the absolute power of analysis was somewhat oversold; and (2) the conflicts in the system between the analytical staff and the program operators was underestimated. Hence the politics of evaluation--in essence the clash between methodology, political forces, and bureaucracy--looms much larger than was imagined in those early days. At the same time knowing more today about how difficult it is to develop and operate effective programs, the need for analysis--the need to assess both our current operations and our new ideas--seems even more pressing than in the less troubled days of 1965.

BACKGROUND OF THE HEAD START STUDY

With these general considerations as background, we now need to look briefly at the key elements within OEO: the Head Start program;

OEO's analytical office, the Office of Research, Plans, Programs, and Evaluation (RPP&E); and the general state of evaluation of the anti-poverty programs prior to the Westinghouse study.

Head Start. The concepts underlying Head Start were based on the thinking of some of the best people in the child development area and on a variety of research findings (probably relatively rich compared to most other new programs) suggesting a real potential for early childhood training, but offering few and often conflicting guidelines as to the detailed types of programs to be developed. In fact, the original notion of Head Start was an explicitly experimental program reaching a limited number of children. The idea, however, was too good. It was an ideal symbol for the new War on Poverty. It generated immediate national support and produced few political opponents. In this atmosphere one decision led easily to another and Head Start was quickly expanded to a $100 million national program serving a half million children. In the beginning Head Start consisted mainly of 6-8 week summer projects under a variety of sponsors (school systems, churches, community action agencies, etc.) with a high degree of local autonomy as to how the project was carried out. Later Head Start funded a significant number of full-year projects with a similar policy of flexibility and local autonomy.

The immense popularity of the early days carried over. Head Start remained OEO's showcase program supported strongly by the Congress, communities, poor mothers, and a deeply committed band of educators (many with a significant personal involvement in the program).

RPP&E. Analysis came early to OEO as its Office of Research, Plans, Programs and Evaluation was one of the original independent staff offices reporting directly to the head of the agency. RPP&E predated the PPBS Bulletin but in many ways was the epitome of the PPBS analytical staff in that it was headed by RAND alumni and stressed strongly the power of analysis. RPP&E was both a major developer of analytical data and a key factor in the agency decision-making process. As one might expect, in this role it had more than once clashed with program operators.

Evaluation at OEO. Critical to our discussion is the fact that RPP&E did not establish a separate Evaluation Division until the Fall of 1967. Prior to that time most of the responsibility for evaluation rested with the programs, but RPP&E had had some involvement particularly in trying to use data developed by the programs to do overall program assessments.

In the case of Head Start, the program itself had initiated a large number of individual project evaluations mainly on the summer program. Across a wide range of these projects it was found in general that participants showed gains on various cognitive and affective measures when tested at the beginning and the end of Head Start. However, virtually all the follow-up studies found that by the end of the first school year any differences which had been observed between the Head Start and control groups immediately after Head Start were largely gone. The meaning of this "catch up" by the control group has been and still is subject to considerable debate ranging from doubts that the immediate

post-program gains were anything more than test-retest artifacts to assertions that the superior Head Start children raise the performance levels of their non-Head Start classmates.

RPP&E has tried fairly early to develop its own national assessments of Head Start, but found little support for such undertakings within the program. Two such studies were developed, but the results were marred by technical and analytical problems. So at the time of the establishment of the Evaluation Division, no good evidence existed as to overall Head Start effectiveness--a fact that was beginning to concern the agency, the Bureau of the Budget, and some members of Congress.2/

As one might guess, the program offices hardly greeted the newly created Evaluation Division with enthusiasm--no one was happy with a staff office looking over his shoulder. In a formal division of labor, three types of evaluation were recognized. RPP&E was given primary responsibility for evaluation of the overall effectiveness of all OEO programs (Type I). The programs retained primary responsibility for both the evaluation of the relative effectivenss of different program strategies and techniques, e.g., different curricula in Head Start (Type II) and the on-site monitoring of individual projects (Type III). The basic logic of this division of labor was to insure that Type I overall evaluations would be carried out, to locate the responsibility for these evaluations at a staff office level removed from the programs, and at the same time place the Type II and Type III evaluation responsibilities at the program level because of the greater need for detailed program knowledge that these kinds of evaluation require.

This division of labor also matches the type of evaluation with the types of decisions for which different levels within the organization have primary responsibility--overall program mix and resource allocation at the top (Type I), and program design (Type II) and management (Type III) at the program level.

THE WESTINGHOUSE STUDY

Thus, it was out of this total complex of conditions that the Westinghouse evaluation of Head Start originated:

-- The explosive expansion of Head Start from what was originally conceived as a limited experimental program to a large national program almost overnight.

-- A developing commitment throughout the Government to increase the analysis and assessment of all Government programs.

-- The national popularity of the Head Start program and the widespread equation of this popularity with effectiveness.

-- Previous evaluations of Head Start that did not provide adequate information on the program's overall impact.

-- The development of a new staff level evaluation function at OEO charged with producing timely and policy-relevant evaluations of the overall impact of all OEO programs.

As one in a series of national evaluations of the major OEO programs, the new RPP&E Evaluation Division proposed for the Head Start program an ex post facto study design in which former Head Start children, then up to three years out of the program, were to be tested on a series of

cognitive and affective measures and their scores compared with those of a control group. Since the program was in its third year and there was as yet no useful assessment of its overall effects, time was an important consideration in deciding on an ex post facto design. Such a design would produce results relatively soon (less than a year) compared to a methodologically more desirable longitudinal study which would take considerably longer.

Within the agency, Head Start opposed the study on a number of grounds including the inadequacy of the ex post facto design, the weakness of available test instruments, and the failure to include other Head Start goals such as health, nutrition, and community involvement. In sum, Head Start contended that this limited study might yield misleading negative results which could shake the morale of those associated with Head Start and bring unwarranted cutbacks in the program. RPP&E did not deny the multiplicity of goals but maintained that school success was the prime goal of Head Start, and moreover was an outcome measure reflecting indirectly the success of certain other activities (e.g., better health should facilitate better school performance). Further, RPP&E recognized the risks laid out by Head Start but argued that the need for evaluative evidence to improve the decision-making process makes it necessary to run these risks. After much internal debate, the Director of OEO decided to fund the study and a contract was let in June 1968 with the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University.

The study proceeded in relative quiet but as it neared completion hints came out of its negative findings. As President Nixon was preparing to make a major address on the Poverty Program, including a discussion of Head Start, the White House inquired about the study and was alerted to the preliminary negative results. In his February 19, 1969 Economic

Opportunity Message to the Congress, President Nixon alluded to the study and noted that "the long term effect of Head Start appears to be extremely weak."

This teaser caused a flood of requests for a full disclosure of the study's findings. In the Congress where hearings were being held on OEO legislation, strong claims were made that OEO was holding back the results to protect Head Start. This was not the case, but the demands did present a real dilemma for the agency--particularly RPP&E. For the results at that time were quite preliminary, and Westinghouse was in the process of performing further analysis and verification of the data. Hence, RPP&E, which in general was anxious for evaluative analysis to have an impact at the highest levels of government, did not want to suffer the embarrassment of a national debate over tentative results that might change materially in the later analysis. However, after much pressure, an early, incomplete version of the study was released. In June the final report was published and it confirmed the preliminary findings.

These background facts are important in understanding why the controversy rose to the crescendo it did as it ranged over the Executive Branch and the Congress with wide coverage in the press. The Westinghouse study is, perhaps unfortunately, an instructive example of public reaction to evaluations of social action programs. As we turn now to a brief description of the study, its findings, and a discussion of its methodological and conceptual base, this milieu must be kept in mind.

The study and its major conclusions are summarized succinctly in the following statement by the contractor:

The basic question posed by the study was:

To what extent are the children now in the first, second, and third grades who attended Head Start programs different in their intellectual and social-personal development from comparable children who did not attend?

To answer this question, a sample of one hundred and four Head Start centers across the country was chosen. A sample of children from these centers who had gone on to the first, second, and third grades in local area schools and a matched sample of control children from the same grades and schools who had not attended Head Start were administered a series of tests covering various aspects of cognitive and affective development /The Metropolitan Readiness Test, the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, the Stanford Achievement Test, the Children's Self-Concept Index, etc./. The parents of both the former Head Start enrollees and the control children were interviewed and a broad range of attitudinal, social, and economic data was collected. Directors or other officials of all the centers were interviewed and information was collected on various characteristics of the current local Head Start programs. The primary grade teachers rated both groups of children on achievement motivation and supplied a description of the intellectual and emotional environment of their elementary schools....

Viewed in broad perspective, the major conclusions of the study are:

1. Summer programs appear to be ineffective in producing any gains in cognitive and affective development that persist into the early elementary grades.

2. Full-year programs appear to be ineffective as measured by the tests of affective development used in the study, but are marginally effective in producing gains in cognitive development that could be detected in grades one, two, and three. Programs appeared to be of greater effectiveness for certain subgroups of centers, notably in mainly Negro centers, in scattered programs in the central cities, and in Southeastern centers.

3. Head Start children, whether from summer or from full-year programs, still appear to be considerably below national norms for the standardized tests of language development and scholastic achievement, while performance on school readiness at grade one approaches the national norm.

4. Parents of Head Start enrollees voiced strong approval of the program and its influence on their children. They reported substantial participation in the activities of the centers....

In sum, the Head Start children cannot be said to be appreciably different from their peers in the elementary grades who did not attend Head Start in most aspects of cognitive and affective development measured in this study, with the exception of the slight but nonetheless significant superiority of full-year Head Start children on certain measures of cognitive development.[3]

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

We now turn to the methodological and conceptual validity of the study--the explicit focal point of the controversy--and this presents difficult problems of exposition. First, both of us are protagonists on one side of the controversy, with Evans being one of the major participants in the debate. Second, a presentation of the methodological questions in sufficient detail to allow the reader to form his own opinions would require an extensive discussion. The final Westinghouse report runs several hundred pages with a significant portion of it directed specifically to methodological issues. Under these circumstances we will summarize the major criticisms that have been made of the study and comment on them briefly in this section. Then in the next major section we will set out our judgment as to the overall technical adequacy of the report and its usefulness for decision making.

The Criticisms of the Study

1. The study is too narrow. It focuses only on cognitive and affective outcomes. Head Start is a much broader program which includes health, nutrition, and community objectives, and any proper evaluation must evaluate it on all these objectives.

Our experience has been that one of the reasons why so many evaluations have failed to produce much of anything is because they have aspired to do too much. We didnot think it was possible to cover all the Head Start objectives in the same study so we purposely limited the study's focus to those we felt were most important. Despite its many other objectives, in the final analysis Head Start should be evaluated mainly on the extent to which it has affected the life chances of the children.

In order to achieve such effects, cognitive and motivational changes seem essential.

2. The study fails to give adequate attention to variation within the Head Start program. It lumps Head Start programs together into an overall average and does not explore what variation there may be in effectiveness as a function of differing program styles and characteristics. The study, therefore, fails to give any guidance as to what detailed changes (e.g., types of curricula) in the program should be made.

This is essentially correct. As discussed earlier, the purpose of the evaluation was to provide a measure of the overall effectiveness of the Head Start program in a reasonably short period of time. This in no way denies the need for a longitudinal study to get at the question of program variation. The fact is that both overall and detailed information frequently are needed, but the latter generally takes much longer to develop.

3. The sample of Full-Year centers in the study is too small to provide confidence in the study's findings. Because of such a small sample, the lack of statistically significant differences between the Head Start and control groups is to be expected and gives a misleading indication of no program effect. With such a small sample it would take quite large differences to reach a satisfactory level of statistical significance.

The randomly selected 104 Head Start centers were chosen in order to provide an adequate <u>total</u> sample. This was then broken down in an approximate 70-30 division to approximate the actual distribution of summer and full-year programs. If we were doing the study over, we would select a larger number of full-year centers. The main advantage, however, would be to allow more analysis of subgroups within the full-year sample. It is very unlikely that the study's principal conclusions about the overall effectiveness of the program would be altered by a larger sample.

A detailed "power of the test" analysis showed that with the present sample size and variance, the statistical tests are capable of detecting differences between the experimental and control groups below the level of what would be practically meaningful. Forgetting the statistical complexities for a minute, the simple fact is that the differences between the Head Start and control group scores were quite small. Even in the cases in which differences were statistically significant, they were so small as to have little practical importance.

4. The sample is not representative. Many of the original randomly chosen centers had to be eliminated.

The study suffered attrition among the centers specified in the original sample because (a) some small rural areas had all eligible children in the Head Start program (and hence no controls could be found), and (b) some communities prohibited the testing of children in the school system. Centers were substituted randomly, and a comparison of the final chosen sample with the total universe of Head Start centers showed the two to be very similar on a large number of factors (e.g., rural-urban location, racial composition, etc.).

5. The test instruments used in this study and indeed all existing instruments for measuring cognitive and affective states in children are primitive. They were not developed for disadvantaged populations and they are probably so gross and insensitive that they are unable to pick up many of the real and important changes Head Start has produced in children.

It is entirely possible that this is true. However, most of the cognitive measures are the same ones being used by other child development and Head Start researchers doing work on disadvantaged children. In those cases (relatively few) where previous studies have shown positive changes

on these very same measures, they have seldom been questioned or disregarded because of the inadequacy of the instruments. In the affective area, Westinghouse found no appropriate test instruments and had to devise its own. Hence the results should be viewed as suggestive but no more. The Westinghouse study used the best instruments available, and with these instruments few appreciable differences are found between kids who had Head Start and those who did not.

6. The study is based on an ex post facto design which is inherently faulty since it attempts to generate a control group by matching former Head Start children with other non-Head Start children. A vast number of factors either alone or interacting together could produce a superior non-Head Start group which would obscure the effect of the program.

It is always possible in any ex post facto study that failure to achieve adequate matching on all relevant variables (particularly self-selectivity factors) can occur. Ex post facto studies, however, are a respected and widely used scientific procedure though one which does not provide the greater certainty of the classic before-after experimental design carried out in controlled laboratory conditions.

In the Westinghouse study, the two groups were matched on age, sex, race and kindergarten attendance. Any residual differences in socio-economic status were equated for by two different statistical procedures, a random replication covariance analysis and a nonparametric matching procedure. Both statistical techniques, which equated the two groups on parent's occupation, education, and per capita income, yielded the same basic results on the cognitive and affective comparisons between Head Start and control group children.

7. The study tested the children in the first, second, and third grades of elementary school--after they had left Head Start. Its findings merely demonstrate that Head Start achievements do not persist after the children return to poverty homes and ghetto schools. Rather than demonstrating that Head Start does not have appreciable effects, the study merely shows that these effects tend to fade out when the Head Start children return to a poverty environment.

It is possible that poor teachers, the impoverished environment, etc., eliminated a significant cognitive advantage gained by Head Start children during the Head Start period. But even if this is true, we must have real doubts about the current course the program is taking. Unless Head Start alone can be improved so as to have positive effects which do not disappear, or Follow-Through or some other program can be developed to provide subsequent reinforcement that solidifies the gain, the present worth of the gains seems negligible. Whatever the cause, the fact that the learning gains do not stick is a most compelling fact for determining future policy.

8. The study's comparison of Head Start with non-Head Start children in the same classrooms fails to take into account secondary or spillover effects from the Head Start children. The children who have had Head Start are likely to infect their non-Head Start peers with their own greater motivation and interest in learning. Their presence in the classroom is also likely to cause the elementary school teacher to upgrade her entire level of teaching or give more attention to, and therefore produce greater gains in, the less advanced non-Head Start group. Thus, the study minimizes Head Start's effect by comparing the Head Start children with another group of children which has been indirectly improved by the Head Start children themselves.

This is certainly a possibility. However, most of the previous before-after studies of Head Start's cognitive effects have shown at most small gains--so small it is hard to imagine their having such major secondary effect on teachers and peers. Moreover, the first grade children

in the Westinghouse study were tested during the early part of their first grade year--prior to the time when such secondary influence on teachers or peer children would have had a chance to occur. On the direct child measures (Metropolitan Readiness Test, Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, etc.) there were only marginal differences between the Head Start and control children at that time. Also, on the Children's Behavior Inventory, a teacher rating instrument, there were few significant differences between the two groups, indicating that the teachers were not able to perceive any differences between the motivation of the Head Start and non-Head Start children. In light of these findings, it is hard to see how spillover or secondary effects could have occurred to such an extent to contaminate the control group.

AN ASSESSMENT

Our overall assessment of the study is as follows:

1. In terms of its methodological and conceptual base, the study is a relatively good one. This in no way denies that many of the criticisms made of the study have validity. However, for the most part they are the kind of criticisms that can be made of most pieces of social science research conducted outside the laboratory, in a real world setting, with all of the logistical and measurement problems such studies entail. And these methodological flaws open the door to the more political kinds of issues. Thus one needs not only to examine the methodological substance of the criticisms which have been made of the

study but to understand the social concern which lies behind them as well. Head Start has elicited national sympathy and has had the support and involvement of the education profession. It is understandable that so many should rush to the defense of such a popular and humane program; but how many of the concerns over sample size, control group equivalency, the appropriateness of covariance analysis, etc., would have been registered if the study had found positive differences in favor of Head Start?

2. The scope of the study was limited and it therefore failed to provide the answers to many questions which would have been useful in determining what specific program changes should be made.

3. Studies which are longitudinal, based on larger samples, and cover a broader range of objectives are better and should be done. But until they are, this study provides a useful piece of information that can be fit into a pattern of other reasonable evidence to improve our basis for decision making. Thus, the Westinghouse study extends our knowledge but does not fly in the face of past evidence. For the summer program the study shows on a national sample what smaller studies have shown--no lasting gain for the Head Start children relative to their peers. This may deflate some myths but not any hard facts. For the full-year program, the evidence of some limited effect is about as favorable as any we have found to date.

We imagine that this type of positive, but qualified assessment will fit any relatively good evaluation for some time to come. For we have never seen a field evaluation of a social action program that could not be faulted legitimately by good methodologists and may never see one. But, if we are willing to accept real world imperfections and to use evaluative analysis with prudence, then such analysis can provide a far better base for decision making than we have had in the past.

What then does the Westinghouse study provide that will help in making decisions? First, the negative findings indicate that the program on the average is failing to produce discernible school success for its participants. Put more bluntly, the study says that along the key cognitive and affective dimension the program is not working at all well. And, from this one can infer directly that we had better be searching hard for and testing new techniques in the Head Start classroom that may make learning gains more permanent; and, indirectly, that the years before and after Head Start had also better be looked at carefully. Second, the evidence suggests the superiority of full-year over summer. Most of all we believe the strength of the study is that it provides credible, validating evidence that the honeymoon of the last few years really ought to be over and the hard work of finding effective techniques should start in earnest.

Thus, the study pushes policymakers toward certain decisions (e.g., move from summer to full-year); but--and this would be true no matter how good a study was--the evidence is not a sufficient condition for a

decision. For this evidence must be weighted in the political process with many other pieces of information. For example, what would be the political consequences of a severe cutback in Head Start? It is important that analysts must recognize the limits to their evidence. At the same time we would stress again the benefits of hard, credible data--a commodity heretofore in very short supply--as one of the critical factors needed in the policy process.

CONCLUSIONS

In this section we will first set out a number of inferences we think we can draw concerning the larger issues of this controversy and then touch on the unknowns that still plague us. The former fall into two categories--program operations and evaluation.

Program Operations

1. We should be far more skeptical than in the past of our technical capability to mount effective large-scale programs; particularly in those areas in which the main program goal is opportunity--a material positive change in an individual's capacity to earn or learn.

We should distinguish clearly between such opportunity programs and maintenance programs in which the primary goal is to deliver a service that is itself a highly valued commodity (the best examples being money and food). The technical problems of the latter are relatively simple compared to opportunity programs. For example, politics aside, it would not be difficult technically to mount a large-scale food or income maintenance program far superior to the ones we have presently. But, for opportunity programs we often simply do not know technically what to do to reach our goals.

2. For opportunity programs we need to start as a highest priority activity a concerted effort to systematically develop new ideas having implications for restructuring ongoing programs or creating new ones and to test the merits of these ideas on a small-scale before mounting large-scale national programs.

Clearly political concerns will often override this dictum of testing on a small scale. The government is not going to be run like a research laboratory. Large-scale programs often will start without a prior tested model. But at the margin, an effort to test may both produce useful tested models and make us think harder about starting large-scale programs without such testing.

The key point is that we believe a commitment by the government to the systematic search for new ideas has great potential for improving opportunity programs. Analysis cannot (and should not) replace politics, but it can over time facilitate better political decisions.

Evaluation

1. We urgently need to evaluate the effectiveness of present programs.

2. In many areas we now have methodological tools that will allow us to do evaluations much superior to those done in the past.

3. These evaluations will have limitations both in terms of scope and techniques; however if used in conjunction with other reasonable evidence, such studies can materially improve our base of decision-making information.

4. The milieu for meaningful program evaluation involves an interaction of methodology, bureaucracy, and politics; it will therefore often be the case that attacks against evaluations will be made which are methodological in form but ideological in concern.

5. Major evaluations of programs should be performed by a staff office removed from the operating program.

Self-evaluation is an almost impossible task for a program manager with strong convictions as to the value of his program. A separate office can institutionalize at least a relative degree of objectivity in that it can be charged specifically within the agency with the task of program measurement, not program defense.

Some people, however, feel that even this may be illusory as the staff office will be serving the agency head who after all is the chief program manager. One cannot escape the fact that evaluation with its potential for indicating that a program is not working is a difficult-to-handle weapon in the arsenal of analysis.

6. Finally, for those of us who urge more evaluation, it is well to remember that evaluation is only one of many inputs--political, bureaucratic, etc.--in the decision-making process and does not serve as a substitute for good judgment.

The Remaining Unknowns

We have come down strongly on the side of analysis--measuring ongoing programs, testing new ones. At the same time we have recognized the technical limitations of evaluation and warned that they must be used with prudence in light of these limitations. But, is this warning not politically naive and hence really a below-the-belt punch to the argument for expanding social programs? As the New York Times on April 18, 1969 reported: "A number of social scientists...have expressed fears that Congress or the Administration will seize upon the /Westinghouse/ report's generally negative conclusions as an excuse to downgrade or discard the Head Start Program." Even when administrators and legislators are pure of heart (but relatively ignorant of the limitations of analytical techniques), will they not overvalue and hence overreact to quantitative evaluations because of the aura of scientific accuracy? Won't the guideline "test and prove before going big" become a facade for shooting down all new ideas and retrenching our commitment to the disadvantaged?

These are profound and difficult problems with no simple solutions. For example, a legitimate question to throw at our convictions is whether we would have gone big on Head Start at its inception. Even given today's knowledge, we might have as the redistributive kinds of changes discussed earlier are a critical need. At the same time today we would not urge either an increase in the program as now constituted or new starts on a large scale in the education area without prior testing.

We recognize the dangers of evaluation and systematic testing being ill-used. But, what course of action is not dangerous, what "good" approach cannot be turned to evil? Is it not even more hazardous to proceed boldly as if we know, when we do not? Does it seem wise to launch new large-scale opportunity programs amid verbal paeans but with no solid evidence of success and to continue to believe our earlier words without a thought of investigating the outcome?

As we pose these questions we trail off into gray areas without a burst of penetrating truth, only nagging doubts. This seems fitting--for to stand unsurely in the morass of conflicting issues simply mirrors the larger reality of today. 1965 and its confidence are literally light years behind us.

Footnotes

1/ Charles L. Schultze, The Politics and Economics of Public Spending, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1968, pp 16-17, 76.

2/ Later, Head Start made its own attempt at national evaluation through its network of university-based evaluation and research centers. But failure to build in control groups and comparable procedures made the results unsatisfactory and the evaluation component of these centers was discontinued in 1969.

3/ The Impact of Head Start: An Evaluation of the Effects of Head Start on Children's Cognitive and Affective Development, Westinghouse Learning Corporation-Ohio University, July 12, 1969, pp. 2, 7-8.