Issues of Governance and Their Implications for Libraries

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THE FALL 1977 ISSUE OF *Library Trends* was devoted to the topic of "Trends in the Governance of Libraries." The articles addressed governance in federal, academic, school and public libraries. Also dealt with were the problems of governance affecting networks or cooperatives of libraries, as well as those of a special information center which markets and sells its services. Because of the relative newness of this issue, its obvious usefulness as an anthology on the subject of library governance, and its lengthy exposition of the governance of each institutional type, this article will make no attempt to cover similar ground. Its purpose rather is to examine several important dimensions affecting not only aspects of the governance of the nation but also the conduct of some of its institutions.

The first of these is the extended controversy over the equalization of educational opportunity; the second, the development of research methodologies particularly aimed at the analyses of public policy-making; and the third is the matter of accountability for public funds. These three issues are not only undeniably interrelated, but also have important implications for the nation's libraries.

Although equality of educational opportunity as a social objective dates to earlier periods in the history of the United States, the acceptance of the concept is a product of the nineteenth century. One historian of education holds that the concept took deep roots into American soil dur-

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ing that century, especially in the frontier states. There "the public domain was free and open to all on the same terms," and Americans enjoyed "a quality of economic opportunity that ultimately led to equalization of political rights as well."[1] Inevitably the supply of free land gradually diminished and, increasingly, education rather than property became symbolic of the route toward economic stability and prosperity.

The attention paid to public education was based on a not unreasonable assumption that if children were exposed to a common curriculum, they would be able to seek career options other than those narrowly prescribed by the occupational outlooks of their parents. Displacing the factors of birth, wealth and family standing, education was to become, in Peter Schrag's observation, "the most effective way for an advantaged family to endow its children."[2]

The rhetoric with which the early common school founders promoted the cause of schooling for all children also permeated the exhortations of those who favored the free public library system. In the 1930s the concept of equalized educational opportunity became further extended when it was used as the rationale for the educationists' campaign to seek federal aid for local schooling. During the bitter years of the economic depression, it became increasingly clear "that genuine equality could not be achieved for all American children unless the federal government entered the field of school support in a substantial way."[3] The librarians moved in a similar direction; under the "equal chance" rubric, the library profession sought federal aid to reduce the disparities in library availability between municipal citizens who had access to libraries and rural residents who did not.

It is important to realize that only the "opportunity" for the pursuit of education was to be rendered equal. The depression generation of educators and librarians, who pursued the goal of federal aid as the economic leaven which would reduce state and local differentials in school or library support, accepted as given that such aid would produce uniform results. Increasingly, however, the period of the 1960s and 1970s has been marked by an ever-growing scrutiny of the *effects* of equalized education rather than on its *provision.* James S. Coleman is of the opinion that this shift in interpreting the concept of equalizing educational opportunity began in 1954 with the Supreme Court's decision to end racial segregation in the public schools:

> I believe the decision would have been more soundly based had it not depended on the effects of schooling, but only on the violation of freedom; but by introducing the question of effects of

> schooling, the Court brought into the open the implicit goals of equality of educational opportunity — that is, goals having to do with the *results* of school.[4]

In the wake of the Supreme Court decision, which reflected either an intentional or innocent shift from an assessment of opportunities to an appraisal of results, several differing but related phenomena burst on the American educational scene. One was a spate of historical studies which attempted a radical revision of long-held ideas concerning the origins of public schooling in the United States. A second development was 2-pronged in that the Court's decision afforded a stimulus to some social scientists not only to evaluate educational performance in terms of income potential, but also to unite their efforts in active governmental policy analysis and research. A third consequence was the concept of accountability by which school performance could be evaluated in terms of results.

Revisionist history is, of course, not new. What is interesting here is that the history of American education had been, with few exceptions, the province of the educationists themselves. Within the past decade, however, historians, economists and philosophers of education, often armed with extensive data, have investigated educational history with the result that the school is seen as a destructive mechanism designed to keep the poor in line. In her critique of the work of these radical revisionists, Diane Ravitch states that it is:

> characterized by their thorough rejection of liberal values and liberal society and their shared belief that schools were *consciously* designed by liberal reformers as undemocratic instruments of manipulation and social control. The radical indictment, in sum, is that American schools have been oppressive, not liberating, and that they were *intended* to be oppressive by those liberal reformers who developed them.[5]

Although the radical revision of the history of schools has served to stimulate similarly revised views of the history of public libraries (evidenced most particularly in the writings of Michael Harris[6]), its importance here lies in the fact that its influence is still unknown: the full extent to which this type of revisionist history, so popular within the last decade, has eroded confidence in American education, and in the liberal tradition credited with its creation, is a moot question.

The second phenomenon has been largely produced by social scientists rather than historians; in particular, by sociologists and economists.

Unquestionably, this movement to examine the schools in light of their capacity as instruments to eradicate social injustice began with the publication in 1966 of *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, a federally sponsored study under the direction of sociologist James S. Coleman.[7] The report provoked wide academic interest, occasioning among other reactions a faculty seminar at Harvard University, the proceedings of which were later published under the title *On Equality of Educational Opportunity*.[8] One of the participants at that seminar, Christopher Jencks, subsequently headed a lengthy research project to refine further the data collected by Coleman and his associates, as well as other economic assessments of educational effects. Published in 1972, the findings of Jencks's research group were, like Coleman's, controversial and pessimistic: "Our research suggests . . . that the character of a school's output depends largely on a single input, namely the characteristics of the entering children. Everything else — the school budget, its policies, the characteristics of the teachers — is either secondary or completely irrelevant."[9] The Jencks study concluded with a message not unlike that advocated by some of the radical revisionists:

> As long as egalitarians assume that public policy cannot contribute to economic equality directly but must proceed by ingenious manipulations of marginal institutions like the schools, progress will remain glacial. If we want to move beyond this tradition, we will have to establish political control over the economic institutions that shape our society. This is what other countries call socialism. Anything less will end in the same disappointment as the reforms of the 1960s.[10]

This is not the place to attempt an evaluation of the merit or worth of these studies: the findings of their critics, both pro and con, have been aired in the literature. The point is that during the past two decades, research into the value and conduct of American public schooling reached the dimensions of public policy analysis.

Policy analysis, policy research, policy inquiry, or policy studies (the terms are often used interchangeably in the literature) stem from a postwar movement largely spearheaded by Harold D. Lasswell, a distinguished social scientist long associated with the Yale University Law School. In 1951 Lasswell coedited with Daniel Lerner an anthology, *The Policy Sciences*,[11] to which a number of the nation's most renowned social scientists contributed. Although the book was widely heralded, intensive academic interest in the policy sciences did not occur until the late 1960s.

Within the past ten years the discipline has become a veritable growth industry. Institutes and graduate schools dedicated to the study of public policy abound. Some, such as the Institute of Public Policy Studies at the University of Michigan or the Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley, are affiliated with academic institutions. Others, such as the Center for Policy Research in New York City, are independent nonprofit corporations. Although maintaining cooperative relations with the American Political Science Association, a separately formed Policy Studies Organization now issues *The Policy Studies Journal,* which is only one of several new periodicals in the field.[12] Enrollment in public policy courses offered by political science departments is on the increase, and a number of textbooks dealing with the discipline have been published.

Numerous factors have contributed to the growth of the policy sciences and policy research.[13] These include but are not limited to the following: (1) the need for evaluation of the social programs launched during the period of the Great Society, the measurement of which lay within the interest and methodological approach of social scientists in universities and private research agencies; (2) the increasing sophistication of computer technology which facilitated elaborate mechanized models for social forecasting; (3) the acceptance in complex organizations of devices to relate planning and budgeting functions to stated goals — e.g., PPBS (program-planning-budgeting system), MBO (management by objectives), and zero-based review — which place emphasis on output measurements based on objectives rather than on input data, such as funds or resources; and (4) the growing sense of disenchantment felt by some social scientists, especially those in the political spheres, with so-called "value-free" methodology, a concept derived from the pure sciences which holds that investigators must be responsive only to empirical or historical data and eschew advocacy stances or positions.

Coleman, the principal investigator of a major policy-research study, provided perhaps the most cogent discussion of the ways in which policy sciences differ from the traditional social sciences by making the distinction between "discipline research" and "policy research." The former is controlled by and responsive to the particular discipline. For example, a political scientist wishing to examine governmental policy relating to mass urban transportation would design the inquiry, carry out the research, and publish the findings in his own appropriate professional journals. In policy research, however, the decision to study urban mass transportation would originate with an agency of government rather than with the political scientist. The agency would then engage the political scientist to make the study, the findings of which would then be subject to governmental rejection, acceptance or modification.

> The defining characteristics of policy research are two: the research problem originates outside the discipline, in the world of action; and the research results are destined for the world of action, outside the discipline. The special properties of policy research stem from the different properties of the disciplinary world and the world of action, and from the translation problems involved in moving between these two worlds.[14]

In a field as nascent as policy research, no one definition will prove totally satisfactory. It is possible, however, to indicate some of the characteristics of policy research: (1) it is interdisciplinary, comprising such fields as communications, mathematics, political science, sociology, computer science, systems analysis, public administration, management, etc.; (2) it is future oriented, its findings often cast in terms of alternative outcomes rather than as one solution or set of solutions; and (3) it is conceptualized as a process in that setting policy, implementing it, and evaluating it form a continuum, the end of which always brings one to a new beginning.

This brief description of policy research does little justice to the complexities of the field, nor does it sufficiently alert the reader to the contrary views held by the critics of policy research, traditionally trained academicians who view the new discipline as fantasy or witchcraft and its practitioners as meddlesome and unscientific.[15] There is much to be said on both sides of the question; political scientists who believe that their inquiries and researches should be made of the government without becoming directly involved in its decisions are quite right in maintaining a healthy skepticism of the social scientist who has aspirations to play the philosopher-king. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that academicians should be credited with greater wisdom in the matter of governance than governmental officials or elected politicians. On the other hand, social scientists have increasingly been called in to advise government ever since Herbert Hoover (surely one of the more conservative presidents) established in 1929 the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, the report of which remains a model of superb data gathering and scholarly synthesis.[16] In this regard, the observations made by the authors of a study issued by the Russell Sage Foundation on computer application to public policy seem pertinent:

> Policy research, like policy itself, is burdened with a political history. The partnership between social science and government is not simply a product of contemporary governmental sophistication on the one hand, and a recent academic longing for "relevance" on the other. It is a relationship that has had its ups and downs for more than fifty years. . . . Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the role of experts and their research efforts in the policy process has become noticeably more prominent, especially since the 1960s, and the functions performed by policy researchers today are not what they were thirty or forty years ago. The systematic testing of policies now receives more attention than it did in the past.
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> The movement toward policy research is unlikely to be reversed. It results from fundamental trends in American politics and does not depend on the increasing assertiveness or recent accomplishments of researchers.[17]

Before attempting to show the relevance of this discussion to the library profession, a brief summary may be in order. Presently, the critics of American public education are numerous and influential. Historians are increasingly delving into the nineteenth-century roots of public education; some of them have disclosed that the schools, far from being instruments to improve the lot of children, were instead miniature factories designed to fuel the needs of a capitalistic economy. Having taken issue with what she believes are the dubious historical methodologies of some of these writers, Ravitch notes the dangers of their approach:

> The historian who undertakes to demonstrate that kindergartens and vocational education were intended to "oppress" and "contain" the children of the poor directs his message at present policymakers. The historian who maintains that American rhetoric and American reality are not only far apart but are entirely contradictory has a political purpose, which is not to encourage people to close the gap but to persuade them that the gap can never be closed because American society is inherently flawed. The historian who asserts that reform in American society always fails and that reformers have always been either knaves or fools is in reality insisting on the futility of reform. These are political messages, intended to have a political effect.[18]

It is not without irony that while some historians are insisting on the almost pathological influence of the schools as agencies of social and economic coercion, some social scientists, disappointed that the schools cannot be shown to have any real effect on the potential earning power of students, castigate the schools for their ineffectuality as instruments of "distributive justice." Analyzing the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century schools, the historians perceive their importance in maintaining class and caste distinctions; analyzing the present-day schools, the social scientists find them to be "marginal institutions" (to use the somewhat chilling description of the Jencks report). It is, of course, too early to show any causal relationship between the effects of these research efforts and the successful passage in California of the Jarvis-Gann initiative which will drastically reduce property tax revenues to local governments. One can speculate, however, that Ravitch may have been far more prescient than she realized when she commented that "the repeated assertions by historians and social scientists that schooling was of little or no intrinsic value has had its impact on policymakers"[19] — and one might possibly add, on the citizens of the most populous state.

It would be ludicrous to try to find some narrow way in which to fit current-day library policy into the overriding concerns shown by decision-makers over the role and function of the public schools. Certainly there is no rash of historical research undermining the liberal tradition on which libraries were founded, nor has there been any mammoth investigation into the economic utility of libraries in relation to the earning or spending power of their users. At the same time, the weight of probes into public education can hardly leave libraries untouched. The premises on which public schools were founded were not dissimilar from those employed to support public libraries, and rhetoric derived from the liberal and humane tradition that reading is a franchise capable of illuminating the mind and renewing the spirit has been used in support of other types of libraries. It is therefore not altogether impossible to assume that libraries too will be called to an accounting.

In noting the traditional absence of real political interest in library affairs, Louis Round Wilson wrote in 1935:

> Unfortunately, the student of government has contributed but slightly to an understanding of the library's services and its governmental relationships. In the main, he has given scant consideration to the library, and when he has considered it, although he has highly rated its potential significance as a social institution, he has thought of its activities as relatively unimportant in contrast with those of other more extensive and expensive governmental agencies.[20]

These sentences appeared in the foreword to Carleton Joeckel's major work on public library governance, *The Government of the American Public Library.* In his study, Joeckel carefully distinguished between "government" and "administration," concentrating his attention on the statutory basis of public libraries and the powers granted their governing boards. His book, seminal in its own time, remains a classic example of what political scientists term the "institutional" approach. Widely used during the 1920s and 1930s, this approach:

> concentrated on describing the more formal and legal aspects of government institutions — their formal organizations, legal powers, procedural rules, and functions or activities. . . . Usually little was done to explain how institutions actually operated, as apart from how they were supposed to operate, to analyze public policies produced by institutions, or to try to discover the relationships between institutional structure and public politics.[21]

Subsequently, political scientists tried to circumvent some of the limitations inherent in the institutional approach and began to examine the behavior of those engaged in the political process. According to one political scientist, who takes here the legislature as his example: "concern shifted from simply describing the legislature as an institution to analyzing and explaining its operation over time, from its static to its dynamic aspects. In the curriculum the course on the 'legislature' often became one on the 'legislative process.' "[22] The effect on the library profession of this so-called "behavioral" approach toward the study of governmental agencies can be seen most conspicuously in the published findings of the Public Library Inquiry, particularly in Bernard Berelson's *The Library's Public* and Oliver Garceau's *The Public Library in the Political Process.*[23] Berelson analyzed actual use patterns of public libraries revealing that their services were primarily concentrated on middle-class constituencies, a factor which was much at variance with stated objectives that public libraries should serve everyone. Garceau concentrated at least part of his attention on the American Library Association, viewing it in terms of a political pressure group rather than a professional society. In short, these studies revealed to the library profession what was actually going on in their institutions rather than illuminating, as Joeckel did, the formal structure of the institution itself. No inference should be made here that the last sentence is intended to be critical of Joeckel's accomplishment. Rather, the point is that his institutional approach was derived from the best political science models of his day, just as the behavioral approach of his successors was reflective of political science methodologies current during the 1950s.

However, within the last decade, as already pointed out, another shift occurred in some aspects of the political science discipline, namely, an increasing emphasis on the study of government as a continuous policy-making process. One of the aims of such study is to provide decision-makers with a wider array of options and alternatives than were previously available in the long-range expectation that policy-making can be improved and made more responsive to the client groups in whose behalf public policies are invoked. In much of the research employing a public policy approach, institutional services are often found to be at odds with client needs. Such findings during previous periods would have precipitated loud outcries for reforms of the existing institutions; recently, however, such findings are often linked with suggestions for alternative means of delivering services outside of the institutional framework. The enormous (now abating) literature devoted to alternative or free schools is but one example of this trend.

The questions asked about libraries by political scientists inevitably reflect the period in which they were asked. During the 1930s, Joeckel exhaustively studied the laws and ordinances of over 300 American cities to classify the structure of public library boards. In addition, he analyzed the socioeconomic characteristics of board members, eliciting data about sex, age, education, religious affiliation, occupation, and other factors. The effect of these characteristics on the policies which these boards implemented, however, did not fall within the scope of his investigation. Working within the behavioral model, Berelson and his contemporaries tried during the 1950s to rank library users according to such data as years of schooling, income and physical proximity to libraries. But the issues now being raised, by at least some policy analysts, go beyond those earlier investigations. Questions in the contemporary vein might include: Is the public library, within its present institutional framework, the most effective vehicle for the delivery of community information services? What are the priorities in determining financial support for the main library with its subject collections and its reference orientation in contrast to the branch libraries, which are the principal outlets in the library's distributive system? Should public libraries, which serve primarily middle-class, upper-income residents, charge fees for services? What percentage of property tax revenues derived from lower-income householders, who do not make extensive use of libraries, is used for library support? Such questions reflect the futuristic orientation of the policy sciences and their emphasis on alternative modeling.

Among the first harbingers of this type of analytical approach to libraries was the Symposium on Library Functions in the Changing Metropolis, sponsored in 1963 by the National Book Committee and the Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. Subsequently published under the title *The Public Library and the City,*[24] the proceedings of that conference, with its suggestions for alternative roles, fee-based services, and greater relevance for low-income citizens, occasioned quite a stir in the library profession.

Even more striking evidence of policy analysis methodology applied to libraries was the publication in 1974 of *Urban Outcomes: Schools, Streets, and Libraries,* the work of three policy analysts affiliated with the University of California at Berkeley.[25] The book is one of several publications descriptive of the university's analyses of services in Oakland, California. In the introduction, the joint authors carefully distinguish between "outputs," which represent "the way to classify goods and services supplied by a public agency and received by (or directed at) the public," and "outcomes," which they define as the consequences of these goods and services on community residents.[26] In the case of the Oakland Public Library (the data on which the analysts drew for the study dates to the mid- and late 1960s), the outputs were such factors as per capita expenditures for public library service, number of volumes in the collection, or number of volumes circulated. But the researchers went beyond these traditional measurements to try to determine whether or not library service in Oakland was distributed equitably. One of the most interesting parts of their investigation dealt with the allocation of the library budget in relation to the amount of property taxes paid by Oakland citizens. Low-income areas of the city, they found, received a smaller percentage of library expenditures than the percentage of tax revenues collected from them. "Our conclusion is that, if the goal of equity is to be achieved, a general shift of expenditures must be made from high- and middle- to low-income area branches."[27]

In examining this book, many librarians may feel that the researchers actually made no new discoveries. But the significance of the study does not lie in the data or in how they were used, but rather in the methodological approach, that is, the examination of public services within the framework of redistribution policies:

> This book can (and does) ask how organizational decisions lead to particular outputs. But our investigation goes further, to the unchartered territory of outcomes. We turn away from producing organization, strictly conceived, and instead focus on the citizen-consumers of its goods and services.
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> Our concept of outcomes includes a subjective element of evaluation because it involves human preferences — likes and dislikes, pain and pleasure. In this book we are the evaluators, and we study the distribution of outputs precisely in order to make normative judgments. Should outputs be distributed in other ways or in different proportions? Are their consequences good (or bad) for various people differently situated? Ought people who are worse off be made better off? The appearance of "should" or "ought" words signals going beyond "facts" into the realm of "values."[28]

Although the findings of the study bear careful reading by librarians, its importance here is dictated by other reasons. When Berelson found that public libraries served a primarily middle-class, better-educated constituency, he did not necessarily urge the library profession to change its focus. A quarter-century later, these policy analysts from the University of California propose nothing less than radical change in the apportionment of library expenditures.

In summary, then, it can be said that Joeckel made his contribution toward greater understanding of the governance of the public library through his analysis of it as a political institution; at mid-century the staff of the Public Library Inquiry applied a behavioral approach to determine who is reading what and why; in the mid-1970s, the policy analysts are placing the public library within the still larger perspective of a society which is "slowly altering fundamental notions of distributive justice." Their methodological approach, which greatly emphasizes value judgments rather than mere facts, is totally consonant with similar investigations of the public schools. Here cost-benefit analysis is employed not merely to increase managerial efficiency, but to augment the effectiveness of public services for the benefit of the client group. Within such a framework, policy-makers are seen not as masters of the polity but as its servants; it is they, not the clients, who will be held to an accounting.

Accountability, then, is the subject for the last portion of this paper. Traditionally, librarians have always been held to a rendering of their stewardship, whether to the board, to the mayor, or — as in the case of an academic institution — to the university president or the provost. Such accounting, however, has been primarily directed to the display of expenditures, the budget itself being a device which shows allocations for the costs of books, binding, salaries, and other expenses. The library's outputs have usually been represented by gross measurements, such as circulation, registration, site use and a few others. Such measurements do not usually, however, reveal inequities in service or performance. The Oakland study serves as a case in point: to know, for example, that the public library there circulated in a given year 4.2 books per capita gives no indication whatsoever of the wide disparity in circulation among branches serving households of differing income, the lowest of which paid a proportionately larger share of tax revenues than the proportion of library expenditure allotted them.

Although the literature of the library profession is awash in evaluation studies of one type or another, these have been directed primarily toward the improvement of institutional efficiency. Borrowing heavily from operations research and cost-benefit analysis, such studies have their utility and should not be abandoned.[29] But they do not address the accountability and distributive policy issues raised in this paper, because they are almost totally dependent on the investigation of patterns of use without reflecting the aspirations or reading needs of nonusers for whom present library services are either inadequate or misapplied.

Nonprofit institutions, such as libraries, colleges or schools, have been plagued by the persistent problem of rendering their accounts in quantitative terms. Modeling themselves on business or industrial organizations, they have sought, often desperately, to find some measurement that could serve as a substitute for the one of profit. Toward the end of the 1960s, the federal government attempted to measure the social well-being of the United States through the use of social indicators.[30] Social accounting, however, is by no means perfected nor, perhaps, will it ever be. The difficulty of the task of accounting should not preclude future efforts to resolve the problems inherent in it. The setting of objectives having capacities for measurement is one way of improving not only the reporting of library services but also their planning and budgetary functions. At the very least, measurable goals do represent a step beyond the traditional rhetoric which has defined libraries as instruments for education, information and recreation.

This paper does not end on a particularly optimistic note. Future historians may indeed perceive the 1970s as the decade of disappointment in which expectations raised during the 1960s were successively dashed. Many issues affecting governance are, unfortunately, not touched on here. This examination of the literature dealing with the equalization of educational opportunity and that of the policy scientists has attempted to address what can be summarized as one of the overarching goals of the economic and social analysts of the 1970s: the increase of the social responsiveness of American institutions during a period of immense social change. That many of these analyses are themselves concluded with bitterness or despair may not be all to the bad; the expression of their disappointment might be seen as a reflection of the possibility that the goal of equality of opportunity has not yet disappeared from the American scene.

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