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978-1-107-07500-9 - Job Skills and Minority Youth: New Program Directions

Barton J. Hirsch

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JOB SKILLS AND MINORITY YOUTH

Minority youth unemployment is an enduring economic and social concern. This book evaluates two new initiatives for minority high school students that seek to cultivate marketable job skills. The first is an after-school program that provides experiences similar to apprenticeships, and the second emphasizes new approaches to improving job interview performance. The evaluation research has several distinct strengths. It involves a randomized controlled trial, uncommon in assessments of this issue and age group. Marketable job skills are assessed through a mock job interview developed for this research and administered by experienced human resource professionals. Mixed methods are utilized, with qualitative data shedding light on what actually happens inside the programs, and a developmental science approach situates the findings in terms of adolescent development. Beneficial for policymakers and practitioners as well as scholars, *Job Skills and Minority Youth* focuses on identifying the most promising tactics and addressing likely implementation issues.

Barton J. Hirsch is Professor of Human Development and Social Policy at Northwestern University, where he is also on the faculty of the Institute for Policy Research. He has published two previous books on youth programs, *A Place to Call Home: After-School Programs for Urban Youth* and *After-School Centers* and *Youth Development: Case Studies of Success and Failure* (with Nancy L. Deutsch and David L. DuBois), both of which received the Social Policy Award for Best Authored Book from the Society for Research on Adolescence.

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Job Skills and Minority Youth

NEW PROGRAM DIRECTIONS

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In memory of Maggie Daley

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PREFACE

The research reported in this book began when Rachel Klein, then senior director of research and evaluation at After School Matters, came to my office to explore whether I would be interested in directing a major evaluation of the program. After School Matters, located in Chicago, had a national reputation as the flagship program for high school youth in the after-school arena. It featured apprenticeships in a wide array of areas that were designed to promote positive youth development and marketable job skills. Participants were drawn from Chicago public schools and were predominantly low-income, minority youth.

I am fairly sure that I sat up straighter, and my eyes opened wide, when Rachel told me that each of their apprenticeships recruited roughly fifty young people, though twenty-five was the limit for enrollment. I quickly suspected that a randomized controlled trial might be possible. A randomized controlled trial was considered the “gold standard” of evaluation. The youth programs that I had previously studied never had sufficient enrollment to justify using this research design. Several foundations proved quite eager to provide funding given the combination of After School Matters’ intriguing program and a rigorous evaluation.

The comprehensive evaluation of After School Matters that was undertaken focused on a range of outcomes in the domains of positive youth development, marketable job skills, academics, and problem behavior. I was especially interested in that part of the evaluation that focused on marketable job skills. As part of this effort, we developed an important new assessment, a mock job interview for high school students, administered by human resource professionals, and the results bore on a major national concern: the high rate of minority youth unemployment. Moreover, our initial evaluation of After School Matters led organically to the development of a promising new intervention to improve the job interview skills of high

school students in the Chicago Public Schools district (which encompasses all of Chicago). Accordingly, this book focuses on the domain of marketable job skills, or youth workforce development, in both After School Matters and the job interview training program. At the same time, I can certainly appreciate that some readers will be interested in the complete set of evaluation findings, and to have these accessible in one place, outcomes in the areas of positive youth development, academics, and problem behavior are presented in Appendix 1.

Accordingly, the book is written for those whose primary interest is in programs to increase minority youth employment, as well as those whose main interest is in positive youth development programs. I have enjoyed the challenge of writing both for those who do and those who do not have a technical background in research. Technical, methodological and statistical points are primarily placed in notes so that those who would like the details can have access to them. To keep the text as readable as possible, I have placed citations to prior publications as footnotes rather than in the main body of the text. Extensive qualitative data about the apprenticeships are presented, as well as the most important quantitative findings.

This book is a result of the efforts of many people who have contributed to and collaborated with the research team during both projects.

I am grateful to the staff of After School Matters, including David Sinski, who was Executive Director at the time of the research, and Rachel Klein, Raymond Legler, and Natasha Smith. Thanks to all the regional directors and specialists who worked hard and assisted in recruitment and planning, and to the apprenticeship instructors who generously allowed access to their programs. The evaluation benefited from the cooperation of Chicago Public Schools principals, staff, and teachers in whose schools the apprenticeships took place. Of course the study would not have been possible without the many young people who graciously participated in the research.

I thank the many human resource professionals who volunteered their time to conduct mock job interviews in the three years of data collection, as well as during the job interview training program that we later developed. I am particularly grateful to Cheryl Berrington and Wilbert Williams, whose contributions were invaluable in the design of the Northwestern Mock Job Interview. Baker & McKenzie LLP generously provided us with access to their meeting rooms for sessions with the human resource professionals.

At Northwestern, I am especially appreciative of the many contributions of my colleague Larry Hedges. Larry directed the more sophisticated statistical analyses and was an unfailing source of sound advice whenever called upon (he is also a coauthor of Appendix 1). The study could not

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have been completed without the help of Kathadin Cook, Megan Mekinda, Jaime Platzer, Deborah Puntenney, Christy Serrano, JulieAnn Stawicki, and Oseela Thomas, who observed apprenticeships and conducted interviews with participants and after-school instructional staff. Special thanks to JulieAnn Stawicki and Deborah Puntenney for helping to manage the project. Megan Mekinda and Kendra Alexander helped to analyze the qualitative data, and each coauthored a chapter in this book and reviewed several others (Megan also coauthored Appendix 1).

The study's scientific advisory board provided valuable insights on the evaluation's design and data analysis and in the preparation of the Technical Report on the overarching evaluation. I thank Jacquelynne Eccles, Greg Duncan, Denise Gottfredson, Robert Halpern, Stephen Hamilton, Reed Larson, Jeylan Mortimer, and Elizabeth Reisner for their expertise and guidance.

Many thanks to the William T. Grant Foundation, Wallace Foundation, and Searle Fund for funding the After School Matters evaluation. After School Matters provided a planning grant in the development stage of the study.

The job interview training program benefitted from the support of a number of individuals who held leadership positions at the time in Chicago Public Schools, including Adam Case, Aarti Dhupelia, and Jerusha Rogers. We are very grateful to the teachers who taught the curriculum, with special thanks to Kevin Rutter. At Northwestern, the project benefited from the creative involvement and commitment of Megan Mekinda, Rachel Hirsch, and Kendra Alexander. I am grateful to the William T. Grant Foundation for their continued funding.

A number of colleagues generously read earlier drafts of different chapters of this book, including Mesmin Destin, James Rosenbaum, and James Spillane. My thinking about these matters was enriched, especially about parallels to the situation of minorities in France, through discussions with sociology faculty at Sciences Po in Paris, where I presented a much condensed version of these findings.

Each member of my family contributed in a very specific way to this project. My son David, when he was in ninth grade, served as the first pilot subject for the mock job interview. My daughter Rachel coordinated the job interview training and taught the curriculum to a dance apprenticeship at After School Matters. My wife, Margherita Andreotti, generously brought to bear her professional editing skills on the penultimate draft of the manuscript. Of course, I am everlastingly grateful to them for their love and support.

I have dedicated this book to the memory of Maggie Daley. Prior to her death in 2011, Mrs. Daley was Chicago's First Lady, as the wife of Chicago's longtime mayor, Richard M. Daley. Mrs. Daley, who was widely admired for her graciousness, had an unwavering commitment to Chicago youth, especially those from disadvantaged communities. She cofounded gallery37, which evolved into After School Matters. She served continually as Chair of After School Matters and was no mere figurehead; Mrs. Daley was actively involved in all aspects of the program. The evaluation would not have been possible without her support.

There is one particular interaction that we had that left its mark on me. After a meeting in which early findings from the mock job interview were discussed, Mrs. Daley drew me aside for a brief, private conversation. In an earnest and heartfelt voice, she told me how much the program needed to improve and that she was counting on me to provide them with good answers for how to do so. Her words spoke to her vision and ambition, and to the kind of honest appraisal that is necessary to realize it. I hope that this book is responsive to her plea.