The School-to-Work Transition Among Low-Income, Minority Youth: A View from Research on Mock Job Interviews

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Youth workforce development is an important policy objective.

- Aging workforce
- Global competition

Employment difficulties of minority youth

Implications for youth and society
Obtaining a Job

- Varied initiatives to improve eventual employment outcomes
- Regardless of exposure to reforms or not, young person must ultimately convince an employer to hire
- Employment interview is critical
Development of Mock Job Interview

- “Mock” job interview
- Collaboration with human resource (HR) professionals
  - Importance of understanding HR perspective
- Interview basics: 20 minutes, 13 questions
  - Behavioral questions (“Tell me about a time when…”)
  - Situational (“What would you do if…”)
- Quantitative data from 1-5 ratings for each question and for selected overall qualities
Evaluation of After School Matters

- Randomized controlled trial of flagship after-school program for high school (lycée) youth
- 13 “apprenticeships”, 10 schools, 535 youth, 92% low-income, ~99% minority
- Mock job interview assessed marketable job skills, an important program outcome
- Interviews conducted by HR professionals. Credibility for business & policy
Evaluation findings

- No significant differences on mock job quantitative data \((p = .83 \text{ for hiring})\) in HLM analyses

- Qualitative data from evaluation
  - Observations of apprenticeships
    - “You won’t be able to get away with that on a real job”
  - Few comments re transferable skills
More qualitative data

- Debriefing sessions with human resource interviewers.
  Similar to focus groups
“for the Cool Clothes [mock job], part of it [job description] was setting out displays, and I said, ‘Have you ever had to do a poster board for a presentation in class?’ [They said] ‘Yeah.’ I said, ‘So that’s designing and marketing. Your poster board would be the same or similar skills to setting up a display of merchandise.’ And they were like, ‘Ohhhh.’ So they don’t think about the thing that they’ve done. When they hear the word ‘experience’...they think work experience or job experience. And so I was getting a lot of ‘I don’t have any experience.’ “
Key insights from debriefing sessions

- Youth often had experiences and skills that are valuable to employers
  - Importance of soft skills

- But youth frequently did not understand this

- Not surprisingly, they often failed to communicate their credentials successfully
Broader theoretical & policy issues

- Failure of many young people to appreciate & communicate their employment relevant experiences is a major constraint on potential for transferring human & social capital acquired in some institutional context to other contexts.

- Does this apply to other situations?

- Important to address this constraint on policy level by creating programs that explicitly focus on developing transfer skills.
Program development

- Collaboration with Chicago Public Schools
- HR task force
- Operationalize recommendations in ways accessible to this age group
- Concerns for scaling up (expanding)
- Student motivation, engagement, & learning
- Evaluation component
Teachers

- Essential to scaling up
- Career Academies
- Pre-implementation workshop
- Ongoing observation and consultation
Students

- Emphasis on experiential, performance learning
- Role plays with teacher
- Positive use of peers
- Complementary learning via brief reading and written exercises
- Varied content and format to sustain interest
HR mock job interview (videotaped)

1. Recognize experiences & skills valued by employers
2. How to talk about prior experiences
3. Refine technique; selection of best examples
4. Apply to additional types of interview questions
5. Communicating interest in job
6. Connecting with interviewers; non-verbals

HR mock job interview (videotaped)
Initial evaluation findings

- 4 classrooms, student $n = 55$
- Nearly triple pre/post hiring rates
  - 20% → 55%
- Statistically significant, effect size = .93/.77
- Additional benefits
- No control group
Final thoughts

- Most employment-related research on minority youth has been deficit oriented.
- Our research has revealed they have resources of value to business.
- Can we reframe employment issues in more balanced ways that are respectful of youth?
- Can we develop programs that emphasize building on strengths—would this approach be more acceptable to teens & more likely to engage them?