

After-School Programs for High School Students: An Evaluation of After School Matters

Barton J. Hirsch

Northwestern University

with

Larry Hedges, Northwestern University

JulieAnn Stawicki, University of Wisconsin

Megan Mekinda, Northwestern University

Rachel Hirsch, Georgetown University

Historical rationales for after-school programs

- Prevent problem behavior
- Enhance academics
- Promote positive youth development

After-school programs for high school youth (ages ~14-18)

- Most after-school programs have younger kids
- What do high school kids want:
 - Romance
 - Leadership role
 - Jobs: money, job skills, connection to adult world, future of adult employment

Why is youth employment important?

- Successful transition from school to work is basic need for every society
- Era of international competition
- Contribute to state retirement systems
- Failure to get jobs can scar youth for long time
- Unemployment can tear at fabric of society
- Minority youth = highest unemployment rate

After School Matters (Chicago)

- Best known after-school program for high school youth
- Enrollment: 7,000+ youth, 300+ *apprenticeships*
 - Instructors = community experts
 - Based mostly at schools
 - Stipend
 - Project-based learning, learn by doing
 - Final product or performance (audience)
- Dosage
 - 3 hours/day, 3X/week, 20 weeks, total = 180 hours

ASM evaluation basics

- Conducted randomized controlled trial. Mixed method assessment
- Does ASM work when it is implemented well?
- 13 apprenticeships, 10 schools, 535 youth, 92% low-income, 99% minority
- Two assessments:
 - Time 1: pre-intervention (September)
 - Time 2: end of second semester (April-May)
- Control group (“business as usual”) = 91% alternative organized after-school activity led by an adult

Treatment Integrity Measure: Design Features

	Treatment N = 114 Mean (SD)	Control N = 112 Mean (SD)	Effect Size (g)	F-Test	p-value
Design Features - Total	4.39 (0.62)	3.80 (0.70)	0.89	42.77	<.001
-Adult taught skill	4.59 (0.69)	3.95 (1.20)	0.66	23.93	<.001
-Deadline	4.20 (1.05)	3.64 (1.23)	0.49	13.02	<.001
-Adult told you how to improve	4.39 (0.95)	3.72 (1.36)	0.57	17.77	<.001
-Related to job/career	4.35 (0.88)	3.25 (1.47)	0.91	45.23	<.001
-Worked in groups	4.41 (1.05)	4.33 (1.15)	0.07	0.24	0.625
-Youth choice in activities	4.37 (0.82)	3.75 (1.09)	0.64	22.99	<.001
-Project viewed by others	4.39 (0.97)	3.99 (1.18)	0.37	7.39	0.007

ASM outcomes

- Positive youth development
 - survey questionnaires (internet-based)
 - Self-efficacy
 - Self-regulation
 - Relationships with adults
 - Occupational values
 - Interpersonal learning

ASM outcomes

- Marketable job skills
 - Mock Job Interview (post only)
(simulação de entrevista de emprego)
 - Human resource professionals (profissional de recursos humanos) (n = 28)
 - 13 questions, 1-5 ratings
 - Behavioral
 - Situational
 - 11 overarching ratings & 2 hiring ratings

ASM outcomes

- Academic performance:
 - School records
 - Grades
 - Average grades (GPA)
 - Number of failed courses
 - Attendance

ASM outcomes

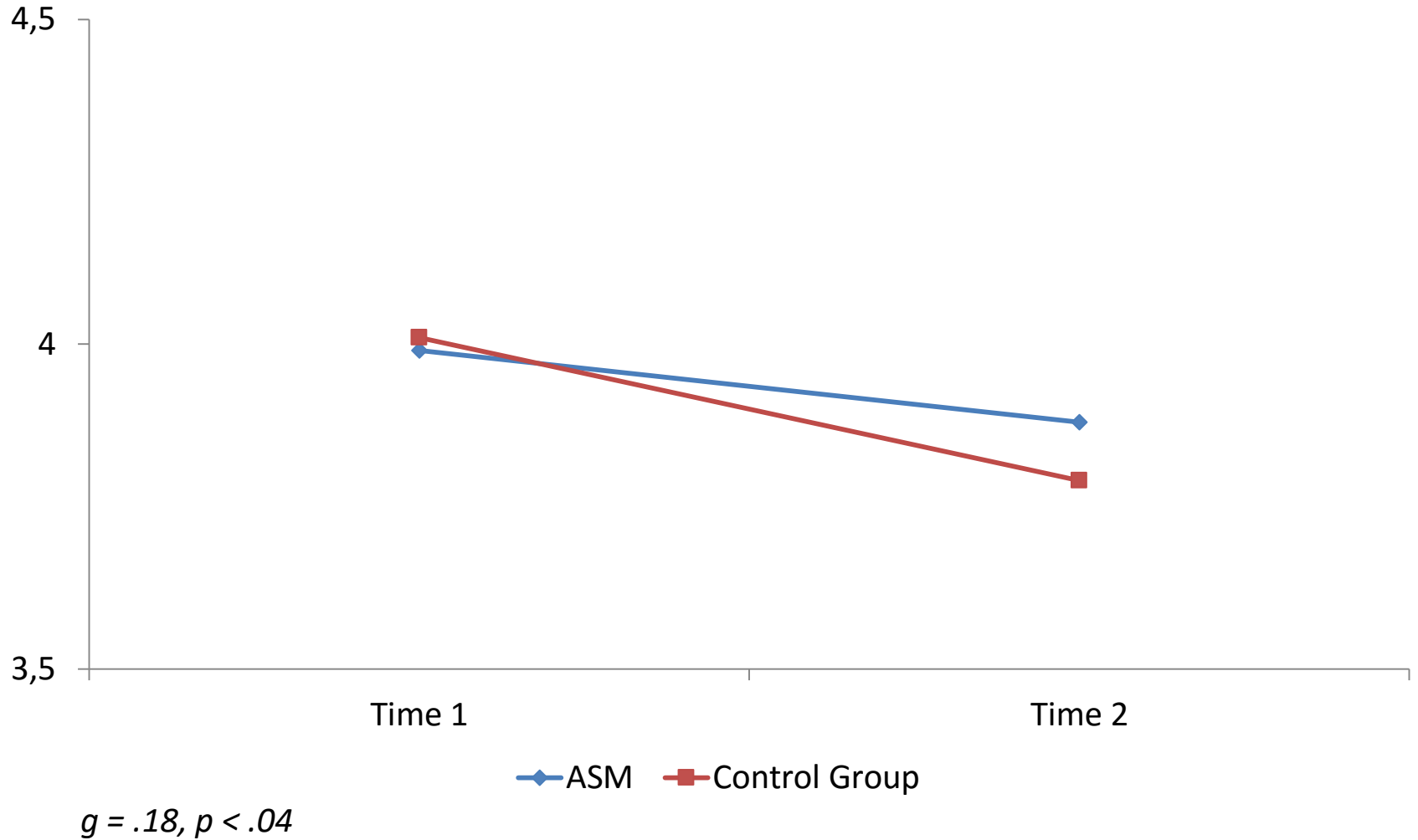
- Problem behavior
 - Survey questionnaire (web-based)
 - 10 item scale
 - Use of alcohol and drugs, risky intercourse, fights, theft, school suspension, sale of drugs, carry a weapon, gang activity

Quantitative results

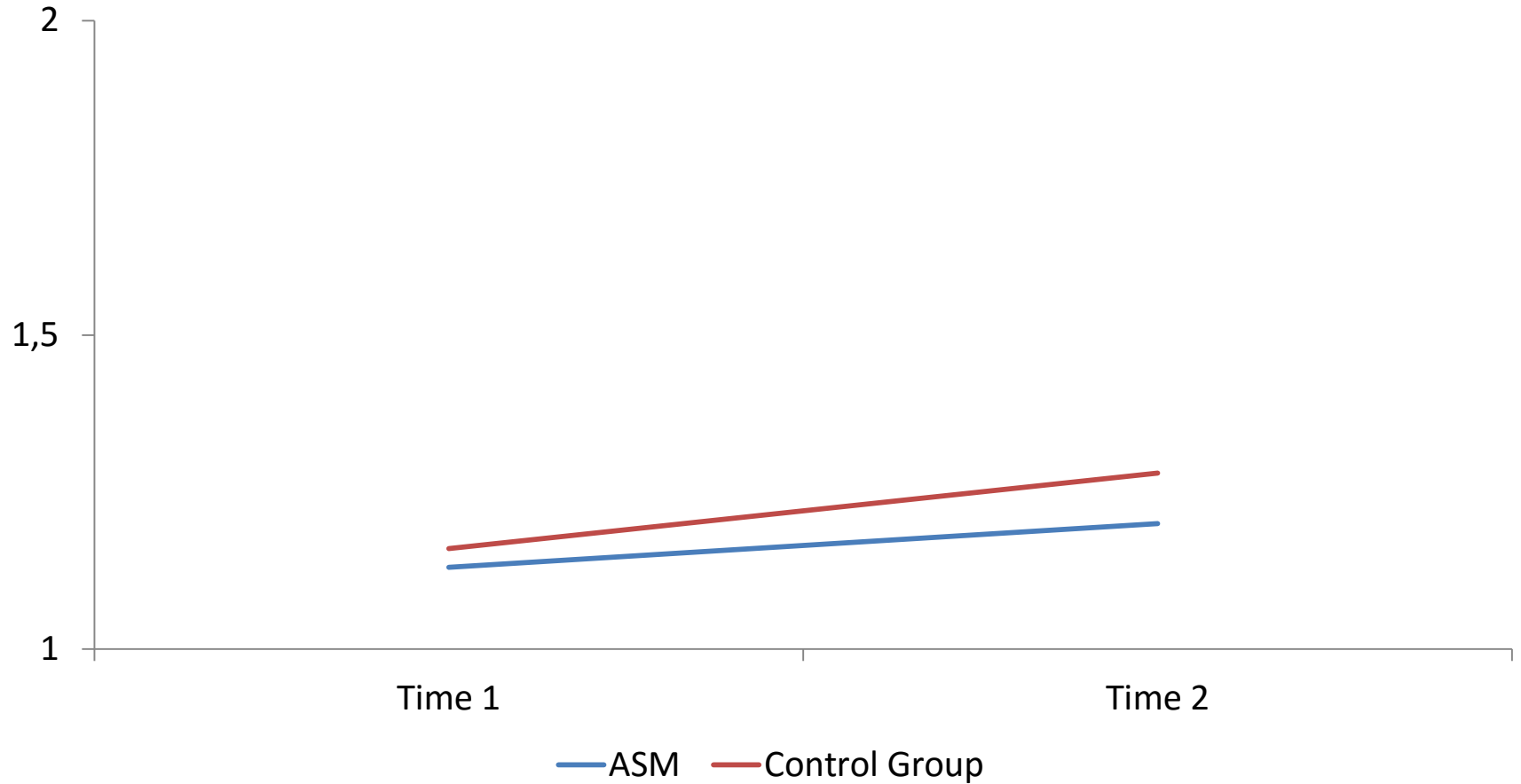
[HLM analyses, ITT, fixed effect]

- Positive youth development = 1/5 significant result (self-regulation)
- Job skills = No significant differences on mock job interview
- Academic Performance = No significant differences for grades or attendance
- Problem behavior = Significant impact (selling drugs, gangs)

Impact on Self Regulation (ITT)



Impact on Problem Behavior (ITT)



$g = .12, p = .05$

Additional qualitative follow-ups: marketable job skills

- Extreme group analysis: 2 best-hire vs 2 worst-hire apprenticeships on mock job interview
- Focus groups with human resource interviewers – and subsequent new program development and evaluation
- Best advice for getting youth engaged and having them do high quality work

Comparative Mock Job Interview Hire Rates

Program	Percent-hired apprenticeship	Percent-hired control
Best Hire:		
Youth View (print media)	79%	32%
Songscape (music)	75%	47%
Worst Hire:		
FUNdamentals (recreation)	27%	53%
Tech Time (technology)	22%	50%

Findings from extreme group analysis: teamwork & communication, professionalism

- Best-hire: regularly engage in meaningful discussions with instructors & peers about work. Explain views, elaborate ideas, ask/answer questions about work, give/respond to feedback
- Best-hire: fostered ease/comfort talking with adults
- Best-hire: regular team interactions, learn to function well in that context
- Best-hire: exposed to norms of real workplaces, high standards for work and behavior

What we learned from the human resource interviewers

- Do youth know what “counts” as work experience?
- Are youth able to successfully communicate their skills and experiences in a mock job interview?
 - The importance of “elaborated” answers
 - Soft skills vs hard skills

Human resources focus group comment

- “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.’ “

New program development

- Teach job interview skills to low-income, minority youth
- Collaboration with Chicago Public Schools
- Task force of human resource professionals


Job interview training program

- Structured exercises based on expert guidelines on best way to answer questions
- Emphasis on experiential, performance learning
- Role plays with teacher
- 6 class sessions over 2 weeks
- Address misunderstandings

Misunderstandings

- Nothing learned in school is relevant
- Interview is a quiz: answer quickly with right answer
 - Fails to give elaborated answer
 - Leads to anxiety and “stiffness”
- Asking questions about job is disrespectful
 - Fails to demonstrate interest in job & learning

Initial evaluation findings

- 5 classrooms, student $n = 70$
- Nearly double pre/post hiring rates
27%  53%
- Statistically significant ($p < .01$)
effect size = .66 (continuous variable)
= .55 (dichotomous)
- No control group

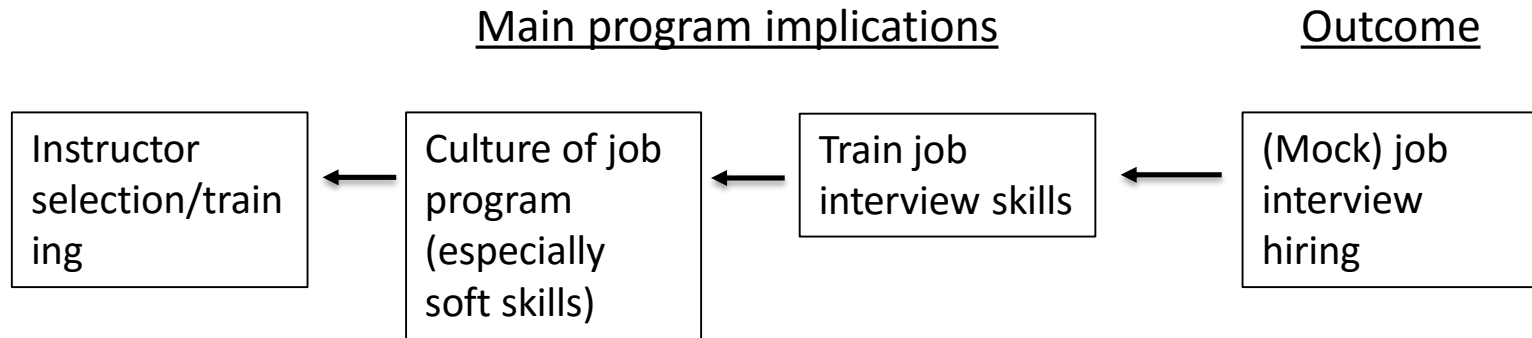
Additional benefits of training program: video evidence

- Focused more clearly on question, less rambling
- Used better examples to highlight their skills
- More thoughtful and reflective
- Less nervous & fidgety, less stiff
- More relaxed & easygoing, smiled more
- More mature about world of work: greater ease & comfort talking with adults, addressed work issues more insightfully


Toward the future

- Usefulness of mock job interview hiring as “hard outcome” = measureable, meaningful societal outcome
 - Needed in after-school, positive youth development programs
 - Similar as outcome to school graduation
 - Human resource workers as judges/gatekeepers as to whether youth are qualified to make transition from school to work
- What have we learned: which programs best prepare youth to achieve this outcome?

Main program recommendations from a backward-mapping approach



Distinctive features of this evaluation

- Randomized trial & mixed methods
- Mixed findings on ASM impacts
- Being hired in a mock job interview (with human resource interviewers) as hard outcome
- Hard and soft skills
 - Programs can teach soft skills  hard outcome
- Backward mapping approach to program design

forthcoming book
available later this month

Barton J. Hirsch

Job Skills and Minority Youth:

New Program Directions

New York: Cambridge University Press