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ABSTRACT

For 30 years, the following programming strategies have become the backbone of public policy regarding youth employment: work experience, labor market preparation, job placement, on-the-job training, and occupational training. Three sources were used to analyze the effects of these core employment strategies on youth: a 1985 comprehensive study of 28 Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act research studies; a 1984 analysis of the Continuous Longitudinal Manpower Survey; and a 1993 evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act. The analysis established that federal programs designed to address the problems of youth employment have failed in their current form. Specifically, the analysis demonstrated the following: (1) the failure of the "magic bullet" theory, which states that some single correct intervention would be sufficient to alter the life trajectory of a disadvantaged youth enough to enable that youth to enter the workplace successfully; (2) the absence of developmental thinking in programs (specifically, failure to recognize the differences between the needs of unemployed adults and those of youth having difficulties making the transition into the labor force); and (3) a lack of long-term research and failure to design studies in a way that would permit their findings to be generalized or compared. (Contains 21 references.) (MN)

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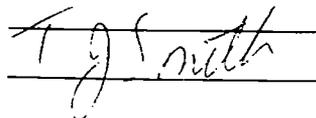
FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH:
FAILINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT TRAINING STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH: FAILINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Public policy with regard to youth employment has developed fitfully over the past 30 years, as federal commitment changed with successive administrations and shifting political emphases. The result has been a succession, rather than an evolution, of youth employment policies.

The major programming strategies used to implement these policies--work experience, labor market preparation, job placement, on-the-job training and occupational training--have accumulated as products of this fitful process. They are the backbone of federally supported youth programs, which serve economically disadvantaged young people between the ages of 14 and 21. To understand youth employment policy, it is essential to understand how these strategies have been developed, how well they work (and do not work) and why, and what perspectives and rationales should inform thinking about how they might be improved. Reviewing these issues is the purpose of this paper.

I. HISTORY OF A POLICY

The establishment of employment programs and policy, beginning in the early 60s with passage of the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) of 1962, was principally a response to the unemployment problems of adults. MDTA originated amid concerns about plant closings, skill obsolescence, automation and technological competition in the international market. Its target population was, in fact, what today would be called "dislocated workers"--i.e., workers displaced from declining industries and in need of transition to new occupations.

Thus, it is not surprising that the earliest strategies developed were narrowly focused on training--occupational training and (always on a more modest scale) on-the-job training (OJT). Such approaches, directed toward unemployed, willing workers who typically had experience in the labor market and suffered only from obsolescent skills, were appropriate. They also made sense when job placement could be used as the sole criterion for judging the value of these programs.

MDTA's youth dimension emerged just one year later. The original legislation, which did not have specific provisions for youth (except to limit to 5 percent the number of young participants), was almost immediately revised to accommodate the growing and increasingly recognized needs of youth. As Mangum (1982:104) has written, "1963 was a very different year than 1962." The first of the baby boom generation turned 16, greatly increasing the number of dropouts and teenagers in the labor force. The unemployment rate of teens rose two percentage points between 1962 and 1963. As a result, MDTA was amended to increase its youth participation limit to 25 percent and add 20 weeks to its remedial education provision.

An antipoverty theme also was added to (though not integrated with) the employment training objective that was MDTA's basic rationale. The Job Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) legislation, enacted during that period, are legacies of depression-era initiatives (the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Administration, in particular); indeed the Job Corps, along with other antipoverty efforts, was initially administered not by the Labor Department but by the newly established Office of Economic Opportunity (Bullock, 1985:78-79).

As the focus on youth and disadvantaged populations broadened, so too did the program mix, which increasingly included ancillary functions, such as outreach, counseling, prevocational programs and job development. But even as these new functions were added toward the end of Johnson's presidency, the political impetus for alleviating poverty began to slow and change course with the change in national leadership.

The Nixon administration took office, Levitan and Gallo write, "with only one positive commitment in the employment and training field: to consolidate and . . . decentralize the diverse programs that had emerged during the 1960s" (1988:7). The existing employment and training "system," composed of programs developed under MDTA and the Equal Opportunity Act (EOA), was judged fragmented, redundant and wasteful. Policymakers set about streamlining these programs and devolving decision-making, program design and implementation to the state and local levels.

The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973 replaced MDTA and EOA as the legislative instrument to achieve these goals. Numerous federally operated categorical programs of the 1960s were replaced with block grants that permitted local prime sponsors to tailor employment and training programs to the needs of the local population. Decategorization meant that, with the exception of the Job Corps, there no longer was a national mandate for youth programs; each prime sponsor decided what proportion of available resources to allocate to youth and whether to serve them in separate programs (Mangum, 1982:107).

Initially, the program mix changed little from that which had evolved in the late 60s. The focus continued to be on classroom training and OJT, along with ancillary outreach, remediation and supportive services. Especially in the early days, CETA programs "largely continued old practices in a new administrative setting" (Anderson, 1980:49). Other than in the Job Corps, the highest youth participation rate was in Title I training programs, which provided mostly short-term work experience and few job-related skills (Bullock, 1985:168).

The Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA) of 1978 represented a major expansion of interest in youth. It increased authorizations for the Job Corps and the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP), and created four new programs targeting disadvantaged youth--the Young Adult Conservation Corps, the

Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Projects, the Youth Employment and Training Programs and the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (Entitlement).

A call for a major research effort to learn more about the causes and cures for youth unemployment was contained in the Act. However, innovation was not really the hallmark of YEDPA. Mangum and Walsh point out that, "with the exception of the Act's provisions which are strictly research in nature,¹ every type of program called for by the Act . . . has been tried before" (1980:1). Providing services ultimately became the major thrust of the Act. Two million youth, in addition to those served in the Job Corps and SYETP, were served by YEDPA programs between 1978 and 1981.

The programs themselves and the research that accompanied them, however, turned out to be short-lived; YEDPA was terminated by the incoming Reagan administration in 1981. The National Research Council's retrospective study of the results of YEDPA, commissioned by the Department of Labor in 1983, found that YEDPA was implemented under conditions that severely constrained both program effectiveness and research findings (Betsey, et al., 1985).

By the end of the 1970s, CETA had lost political support. The Reagan administration argued that since job creation was the responsibility of the market, employment training activity should be shaped by the private sector. It therefore devised an altered system in which business would play a major decision-making role. In 1982, CETA was replaced with the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which redesignated local prime sponsors as service delivery areas (SDAs) and gave ultimate control over job development and training to Private Industry Councils (PICs).

JTPA eliminated public sector work experience (private sector-based work experience for youth is allowed, but its use is limited) and instituted a system of performance measures that, many observers feel, tended to drive the decentralized system to operate shorter-term programs for better-prepared participants. The remaining strategies for youth under JTPA, however, are the same as those under CETA.

In this brief history, several points stand out. First, the most consistent emphasis of youth employment policy has been training (Grubb, 1989:35); work experience and employment--equally plausible approaches in preparing youth for jobs--have never been primary policy aims.

With a training focus has come a stress on outcome measures that pertain to the labor market: employment and wages. Since they underlie the performance measures that are applied to programs, they drive programs and their operators to focus on services that seem most likely to increase them.

¹ One such provision was significant: the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects, which indeed was a departure from what had been previously tried.

Second, those work experience strategies that have been tried with youth always have had mixed purposes: poverty alleviation and income transfer (NYC, SYETP), economic recovery (Title I of CETA) and school retention (Entitlement). The large-scale, nationally available work experience programs seldom have been used in a strategic, development-oriented way. Nor, in the main, has such use been encouraged.

Third, the program strategies, considered as a group, still reflect their genesis as remedies for adult employment problems. In many communities, youth and adults are enrolled in the same labor market preparation, OJT or occupational training programs, with no provision for potential differences between the two groups (Berkeley Planning Associates and Public/Private Ventures, 1992).

Finally, youth employment efforts have been part of legislation whose level of funding and breadth of coverage have always been relatively modest. They have never served more than 10 percent of the eligible population and now probably serve no more than 4 percent (Sawhill, 1989:24-25). Other estimates suggest that only about 5 percent of the eligible youth population is served (National Commission for Employment Policy, 1987). The scale of youth employment and training programs in most communities has been small relative both to the problem and to other institutions--particularly schools--that serve youth.

Thus, the field's knowledge and thinking about the effectiveness of its programs is circumscribed by a preference for training over work experience; by reliance on a traditional set of strategies (that in fact relate more to adults than youth) around which knowledge is organized; and by a narrow focus on employment outcomes that excludes attention to developmental and other youth needs.

From a policy standpoint, this employment focus has seemed quite reasonable: the ultimate outcome of employment programs should be employment. Yet the complex problems and needs of disadvantaged youth clearly would seem to warrant a fuller set of strategies, or changes in the way traditional strategies are shaped and carried out in the field.

II. PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: THE FINDINGS

The clearest evidence currently available about the effects on youth of the core employment strategies has been produced recently--over the past 15 years. It is based on analysis of results produced under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), particularly those produced by the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA), one of the largest demonstration and research efforts undertaken in the social policy field.

To summarize the prior work, this review presents findings from four sources. The first is the comprehensive study conducted by the National Research Council (NRC) (Betsey,

et al., 1985) of 28 YEDPA research projects. This in many ways is a canon of findings for the field, despite unevenness in the "quality of the available evidence" it reviews.

The second source is an analysis of the Continuous Longitudinal Manpower Survey (CLMS) conducted by the Urban Institute (Bassi, et al., 1984). This analysis is not derived from individual program evaluations. Instead, it is a net impact analysis comparing outcomes for CETA participants in the CLMS sample with those for a comparison group of participants in the Current Population Survey. Its findings are far less clear-cut than those from either YEDPA or more recent demonstration research; issues regarding its methodology have been raised;² and, as noted below, the program elements it analyzes differ from those in the NRC report.

The third source is findings from one research and two demonstration research projects conducted since 1984. The reason for their inclusion is that the projects are more recent, and the research these projects have produced meets the criteria established by the NRC's Committee on Youth Employment for its review (Betsey, et al., 1985:100).³

The final source is the recently published evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act (Bloom et al, 1993), which provides estimates of program impact on out-of-school youth (ages 16 to 21). These findings, based on differences from randomly assigned treatment and control groups, come close to being the current "state of the field" regarding the effectiveness of youth programs.

The presentation format adopted here displays the general pattern of findings at the broadest level, pertaining to five major employment and training activities or strategies:

- **Work Experience:** employment and general work experience in temporary subsidized jobs, full- or part-time;
- **On-the-Job Training (OJT):** occupation-related training provided by the employer on the job;
- **Labor Market Preparation:** improvement of attitudes, knowledge and basic skills as preparation for employment;

² Using data from the Supported Work demonstration, Mathematica Policy Research compared results from an authentic control group with those obtained with derived comparison groups, such as those used in the CLMS analyses by the Urban Institute (Bassi, et al., 1984, reported here) and Westat (Fraker, et al., 1984). They conclude that comparison group impact findings differ markedly from those for control groups and are highly dependent on the manner in which the comparison sample is framed (Fraker, et al., 1984:119-123).

³ Findings from the current work-welfare demonstrations, researched by MDRC, are not included in this review because the major focus of most such programs is not youth.

- **Job Placement:** activities, such as job search assistance, placement and follow-up, intended to place youth in unsubsidized jobs; and
- **Occupational Training:** provision of occupational skills and knowledge as a prerequisite to either further training or job placement.

These headings are misleadingly precise. Most employment training programs may be predominantly one or another of the five. But almost invariably the individual programs represent combinations of services that are provided at varying quality and intensity levels. Thus the listing above provides a general framework for interpreting results, but must be used with caution.

The tables present the major contours of what we know about the effectiveness of these strategies. A "+" sign indicates findings of positive impact, a "-" means findings of no impact or (in several cases) negative impact, and "NA" means not available. Table 1 presents a summary of overall results for youth, based on the first three sources listed above, and Table 2 indicates (where available) whether these are short- or long-term effects.

Table 3 summarizes the 18-month youth results from the National JTPA evaluation (Bloom et al, 1993). These are grouped somewhat differently from the findings in the first three sources; it is quite clear, however, that the overall pattern of impacts is fundamentally similar to that found in Table 1.

Indeed, the overall results shown in these tables--which reflect research of generally high quality extending back some 15 years--are soberingly modest. Hahn and Lerman, in their review of CETA youth findings, conclude that "CETA programs, taken as a whole, failed to improve the early labor market experiences of participants" (1985:36). Bassi, et al., reach similar conclusions (1984:64).

The Job Corps alone among the programs reviewed by Betsey, et al., produces moderate, sustained earnings gains, while evaluation research conducted since 1985 has found only small positive (and short-term) results or no effects. In particular, the latest JTPA findings have produced considerable concern. While JTPA offerings (along with other programs) appear capable of making a significant difference in the rate at which young participants gain a GED (1993:23), they have no positive effects on participants' employment and earnings--the basic reason they are offered to youth.

Table 1
SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE REGARDING PROGRAM STRATEGY EFFECTIVENESS

Strategy	National Research Council	Continuous Longitudinal Manpower Survey	Research Since 1984
Work Experience	-	-	-
On-the-Job Training	NA	NA	NA
Labor Market Preparation	+	NA	NA
Job Placement	+	NA	NA
Occupational Training	+	-	-

Sources: Betsey, et al., 1985; Bassi, et al., 1984; Wolf, et al., 1987; Cave et al., 1991.

Table 2
SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE REGARDING PROGRAM STRATEGIES'
SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS.

Strategy	National Research Council		Continuous Longitudinal Manpower Survey		Research Since 1985	
	Short Term	Long Term	Short Term	Long Term	Short Term	Long Term
Work Experience	+	-	-	-	-	NA
On-the-Job Training	NA	NA	+	-	NA	NA
Labor Market Preparation	+	-	NA	NA	NA	NA
Job Placement	+	-	NA	NA	NA	NA
Occupational Training	+	+	-	-	-	NA

Sources: Betsey, et al., 1985; Bassi, et al., 1984; Wolf, et al., 1987; Cave, et al., 1991.

^a Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects findings, which are heavily affected by participants in just two sites; the follow-up sample for the analysis was mostly African-American.

Table 3
SUMMARY OF 18-MONTH EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS
FOR 16-21 YEAR OLD OUT OF SCHOOL YOUTH
FROM THE NATIONAL JTPA EVALUATION

Strategy	MALES	FEMALES
Classroom Training	-	-
OJT/Job Search Assistance	-	-
Other Services	-	-

Source: Bloom et al. 1993

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From these findings it seems altogether reasonable, if discouraging, to conclude that 20 years of programming designed to address a major need of youth--for work and income--have failed in their current form. Among policymakers, such a conclusion is fraught with risk: it raises the specter that "nothing works," and thus that program investments are unsupportable. Thus it is imperative to understand these findings in a broader context, and to frame new and productive ways for rethinking youth employment efforts. Along these lines, three points of departure are worth considering.

1. The Failure of the "Magic Bullet" Theory. The rationale underlying much employment training policy for youth has centered, often implicitly, on the idea that the right single intervention would be sufficient to alter the life trajectory of a disadvantaged youth sufficiently to enable her or him to enter the workplace successfully. This belief has usually also been coupled with ideas of cost-effectiveness--i.e. such interventions should be spare and inexpensive.

Evidence from the Job Corps in a sense supports the "single intervention" theory (though the Job Corps is among the most intensive and costly of job training programs). However the evidence from most other approaches, viewed cumulatively, suggests quite the opposite: there are no quick fixes, and we should seek a different paradigm (Walker and Vilella-Velez, 1992).

The evidence from Public/Private Ventures' Summer Training and Education Program (STEP) is instructive in this regard. The program's primary thrust was to deter early school-leaving, a chronic problem that results in poor labor market performance and low incomes. While the reasons young people drop out of school are numerous, varied and often interconnected, STEP sought to focus on two proximate causes that a research demonstration strategy could address within the confines of available public resources: school failure, particularly poor performance in basic skills; and early parenting.

The program was consciously set in the summer in order to capitalize on the need of low-income youth for both income and added support as they move from intermediate to high schools and approach the legal age of dropping out. Also conscious was the choice of an existing, nationwide institutional vehicle, the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP), authorized by Title IIB of the Job Training Partnership Act, which has existed in various forms since 1965. If STEP succeeded, its connection to a national program would amplify prospects for later adoption on a wider scale. SYETP was then--and is now--the nation's largest youth employment program, providing minimum-wage work experience--usually in isolation from other program elements--for some 600,000 youth each year.

In five communities, Public/Private Ventures successfully randomized 4,800 14- and 15-year-olds into treatment and control groups, and implemented a consistently operated

program intervention, as evidenced by independent field audits and in-program outcome data. STEP youth--all below grade academically and one-third of whom had been held back in school--had high attendance rates in the program and a high return rate (75%) for the second summer.

The short-term impacts on youth who participated in the full STEP program, as compared with control youth who worked full time on SYETP jobs, were consistently impressive in reading, math and knowledge of responsible social and sexual behavior. STEP treatments had test scores that were approximately a half-grade higher than controls in both math and reading, and showed substantial improvement in their knowledge of pregnancy prevention--all generated in a six- to eight-week period during each of two summers. At one level, at least, STEP truly "worked" and worked well.

But long-term research completed in 1991 shows that the impressive summer impacts did not hold up once youth left STEP and returned to their regular school and life routines. And several years after finishing the STEP program, treatment youth were no better off than the control youth who had summer jobs only. STEP youth had dropped out of school at the same rate and showed no improvement in early labor market performance or reduction in rates of teen pregnancy. In short, a positive and successful experience in work, education and life skills instruction over two summers was not sufficient to alter the life trajectories of poor urban youth (Grossman and Sipe, 1992).

Thus one urgent necessity for rethinking youth employment policy is a paradigm shift. It remains essential to use interventions that show evidence at least of short-term effectiveness. But unless these are part of an effective larger strategy of building continuous supports and opportunities for youth, their beneficial effects will be lost. That lesson--rather than the conclusion that "nothing works"--is the appropriate perspective for understanding the body of research we reviewed earlier.

2. The absence of developmental thinking in programs. The inability to produce desired results for disadvantaged youth is tied to the history of how youth programming has been developed over the last two decades. In particular, it seems critical to recall that most all these interventions have evolved from employment programs for adults. In fact youth employment has for the most part ignored the fundamental, and critical, difference between the needs of unemployed adults and those of youth (particularly the disadvantaged) having difficulties making the transition into the labor force.

Unlike adults, youth coming to second-chance programs are undergoing the psychological, emotional and social development that is an inherent part of the passage through adolescence. Negotiating the transition from school to the labor market requires more than the acquisition of skills specific to any occupation. It is also necessary for youth to master the developmental tasks associated with achieving the cognitive, emotional and social maturity that is critical to long-term stable employment (Smith and Gambone, 1993).

So, unlike programs that serve adults, youth interventions must address the full range of developmental needs associated with this stage of life. For example, youth served by training programs need to establish an independent identity, develop a self-concept and fill the needs for affiliation, acceptance, affection, approval and competence.

At the stage when employment programs try to intervene, adolescents are also trying to reason more abstractly, think less egocentrically, see things from others' perspectives, and develop a more sophisticated style of moral reasoning. They must learn to evaluate new situations and make decisions about courses of action based on the potential consequences of their behavior. Yet for the disadvantaged youth who are served by these programs, the process of becoming self-sufficient is further impeded by the circumstances under which it occurs--the severe and persistent poverty in which many of them live.

Thus, systematic thinking about how principles and findings from adolescent psychology can be successfully incorporated into federally sponsored employment training programs is an essential. Initial work to bring such theory and ideas to bear (Gambone, 1993) suggests the potential, as well as the need to rethink both institutional arrangements and the level of resources necessary to make programs more developmentally effective.

3. The nature and state of research and data. Just as discouraging as the story the evidence relates is the quality of the evidence itself. Most research is only short-term; the nature of the impacts differ in kind, in quality and in the segments of the youth population to which they apply. Findings can seldom be generalized or compared because of differences among the programs and service elements upon which they are based (Taggart, 1981:20).

The evidence of what works for whom is also limited. No systematic investigation of program effectiveness by participant age group has been made. Reporting of program effects on racial subgroups is usually limited by the small samples and differing measures used in the evaluations. And the quality of program implementation, undoubtedly a determinant of effectiveness, is seldom measured, thus limiting the value of research findings.

In part, the political environment in which much of the research was conducted explains its fragmentary and uneven quality, as interest in specific issues--and the level of support for research of any kind--have ebbed and flowed.

And in part the pre-eminent role of random assignment impact studies in evaluating these programs has shaped our current knowledge. The methodology stresses the importance of the net impact measure as a scientifically respected mode of evidence. To be sure the need for reliable, persuasive findings in the youth employment field is indisputable.

Yet in many instances the focus on measures of this kind has often occurred at the expense of careful attention to the nature of the youth interventions themselves. The actual operations of programs are usually documented with considerably less rigor than the impacts they are counted on to achieve. Consequently, we are far more often able to say what the program did than what the program was.

The limitations of this approach are reflected in the recent JTPA evaluation, when the authors, seeking to provide some context for the poor showing of the youth employment programs, are left to conclude:

But although this analysis has identified groups not being adequately served by the [JTPA] program, we cannot use these findings to prescribe ways to serve them better. The study was designed to observe only the impacts of JTPA as it was operated during the study period, not alternative ways of serving the same population. (Bloom et al, 1993:31).

This is an appropriate enough characterization of the findings. But it is of scant use in trying to decide how to make the programs better.

The needs in research are of two kinds, which must both be addressed over time if we are to make progress in serving disadvantaged youth through publicly funded efforts. First, we need new, strong theories and hypotheses to undergird a "next generation" of programs. Program thinking in the employment training field has been mechanistic, and dominated by (often narrowly framed) economic reasoning. It must be substantially enriched by new thinking that stresses the developmental, psychosocial processes adolescents undergo, and identifies tangible, pragmatic ways that those processes can be enhanced and supported. The latter point--the emphasis on the pragmatic--is essential if new policy is to become more "theory-driven" and serve youth more effectively.

Second, we must be far more scrupulous and far-sighted in developing basic data and measures to guide our work. The youth employment field has been unsystematic in its approach to documenting what happens in programs because prevailing "theories" have viewed programs as mechanisms for correcting deficiencies in youth, rather than environments whose culture and climate may be as important as the services they seek to provide. Out of better applied theory should come research that begins to measure persuasively and constructively the potential connection between program "environment" and program effect.

With that, we must have detailed longitudinal measures of youth themselves. In part this must be the responsibility of the program evaluator: to capture highly detailed information about youth and their participation in the program--detailed and rich enough to address the question most frequently asked of youth employment policy: what works best for whom?

But we must also develop better national measures and data sets. At present there are few useful, large-scale national data bases that provide rich detail about youth; and practically none that permit large-sample understanding and analysis of poor adolescents.

Our capacity to develop understanding, stronger theories, and better ways of interpreting results and refining our thinking must proceed at two levels: through far more powerful research into programs and the youth who engage in them; and through the capacity to understand those findings in a larger national context. In this way we can use the tools of social science research to build a coherent body of knowledge, and over time build from that knowledge effective strategies to deal with the nation's most needy adolescents.

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