

Counterfactual impact evaluation of a pilot program on bullying migrant adolescents.

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The present case study describes the starting steps of a counterfactual evaluation design assessing the impact of a pilot training program addressed to foreign adolescents at high dropout risk in junior high school, their family and their teachers. The intervention is jointly developed by state junior high schools and Piazza dei Mestieri, a private training centre for adolescents in Turin, Italy. The project involves as well some junior high schools and training centres in France (Chambery and Lion) and in Belgium (Liège), which are supposed to develop similar interventions on immigrant students in the next future.

All students involved in the program attend the first junior high class and had some bullying experience, either as victim or bully. This is fundamental, since bullying is an important predictor for drop out behaviour, most of all among young adolescents. Hence, the intervention is supposed to reduce drop out risk at school by a multifaceted treatment on the educative community, involving students, teachers, and families. A preliminary experience run in the recent past, had positive results, although the evaluation was based only on qualitative evidence and on the subjective assessment of the teachers.

The pilot experience that will be presented in the paper will be evaluated through experimental counterfactual approach. Moreover, it is addressed to migrant students, who are more exposed to bullying than native, and so it concerns a more disadvantaged but also more homogeneous target. .

During the experiment, the treated students are transferred to the training centre for two days a week, during institutional school lessons, for a 290-hour professional training course. The course has strong practical contents (bread-maker, chef's assistant, ...) and aims at restoring students' interest in education by professionally-oriented teaching, inductive innovative pedagogic methods, and individual mentorship. On their turn, teachers are involved in a weekly seminar, which reinforces their pedagogical approach to migrants' and bullying problems. Finally, families are involved through seminars and collective meetings, aiming at raising their awareness on bullying episodes at school.

For the project evaluation we constructed a grid of profiling variables, starting from the one developed and successfully applied in the project "Provaci ancora, Sam!" (<http://www.provaciancorasam.it/>). That will be monitored, for students belonging both to treated and control groups. The aim is to assess social and behavioural skills, alongside other variables concerning school performance.

Previous experimental evaluations of similar programs (see Kautz et al., 2014 for a survey) provide ambiguous results: depending on program features such as length of the treatment, role and pervasiveness of training, tutors, mentors, families' and peers' influence, long-term analyses showed either positive (Durlak et al., 2011; Tierney et al., 1995; Orr et al., 1994) or negative (Rodrigues-Planas, 2012) effects on some outcome variables such as behavioural attitudes, character skills, educational attainment, future wages and other labour market outcomes. For this reason the project will adopt a randomised experimental design, so as to get sound evidence on the effectiveness of the implemented activities.

References

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