

Getting parents involved A field experiment in deprived schools

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Motivation

- ▶ Significant differences in parental involvement across families with different social status
- ▶ Any **causal** relationship between the relatively good performance at school of pupil from well-off families and the relatively strong involvement of their parents?
- ▶ Is parental involvement given or can it be influenced?



Questions

- ✓ Is parental involvement an **input** in the educational production function?
 - ✓ Is it really possible to improve parents' involvement ?
 - ✓ Has increased parental involvement any effect on children?
 - ✓ Does the effect on program participants spread out on other families?
- ▶ Specific importance of **spillovers** as only a minority of volunteer families tend to participate in such a program



Program

- ▶ Implemented in 6th grade in deprived urban areas (20% first-generation immigrants)
- ▶ 3 parents-school head meetings during first trimester
- ▶ Who's who in the school; everyone can help his child (but how?); what to do with report cards?
- ▶ Opportunity for parents to share experience
- ▶ Very low cost



Theory of change

- ▶ Increased parental awareness: better help + monitor children
- ▶ Translates into child behaviour + achievement
- ▶ Improves class working conditions : larger impact
- ▶ Children influence each other: larger impact



Institutional setup

- ▶ Head of school district (Paris suburban area) wants to implement that policy
- ▶ Contacts research team to setup a RCT
- ▶ Iterations to define a design acceptable to all + relevant outcomes and their means of measurement
- ▶ Convince 37 schools to enter the experiment
- ▶ Financed by the French Experimental Fund for the Youth



Why a randomized field trial?

- Assume you invite parents to the meeting
 - Some come: they are treated
 - Others don't come: they are untreated
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- ▶ It would be wrong to compare the outcomes of those treated and untreated, because they are likely very different
 - ▶ Even conditional on observed characteristics



Why a randomized field trial?

- In our experiment, parents are more white collar and more biparental
- But they are more often parents of boys, and with relatively bad marks
- ▶ Had we compared volunteer and non-volunteer families we would have found that the treated have lower behavioral scores at the end of the year
- ▶ Our randomized control trial just shows the opposite!



Design

Possible units of randomization:

- Schools
 - Classes in schools
 - Pupils in classes
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- ▶ School randomization would make no sense with only 37 schools
 - ▶ We would like to identify spillover if there is any
 - ▶ The chosen design mixes pupil and class level

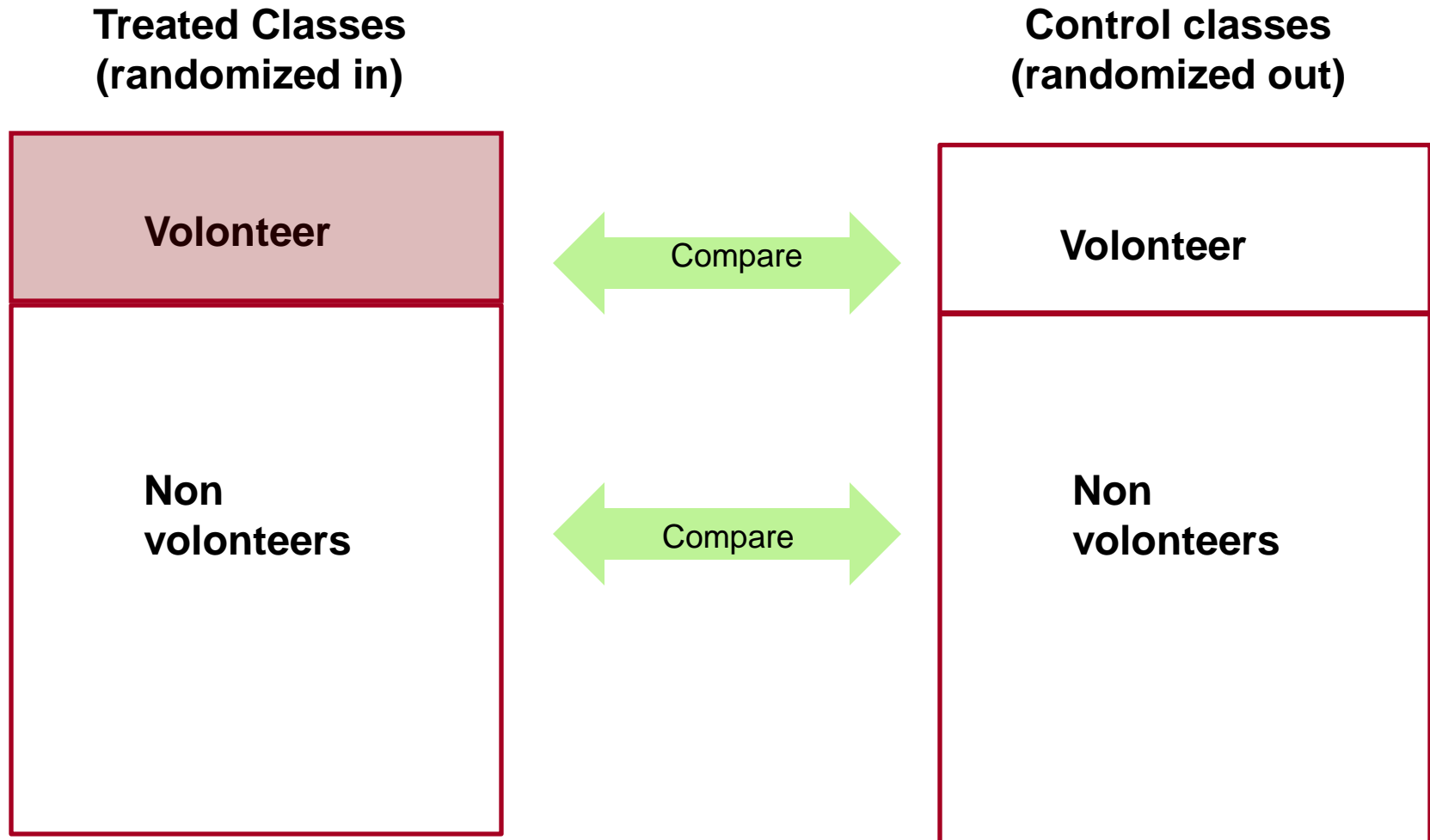


Design

1. Identify volunteer parents in all the schools (6th graders)
 2. Within each school, randomize half classes
 3. Only **volunteer** parents in **treated** classes are invited to the meetings
- ▶ Ensures that families in treated and control classes are similar
 - ▶ Significant differences by the end of the year are surely attributed to the intervention



Design: Four groups



Sample

- ▶ 34 middle schools, 183 classes, 4,300 6th grade pupils
- ▶ 20% volunteers
- ▶ *Among volunteers*, actual take-up rate 50%



Outcomes

- ▶ Parental behaviour and perceptions
- ▶ Pupils' behaviour
- ▶ Pupils' cognitive achievement



Measurement

Comfront multiple sources

- ▶ **Parents:** year-end survey (response rate 80%)

Individual appointments with teachers, participate in parental organization, understand local school, etc.

- ▶ **Pupils:** Normalized tests beginning and end of year + school level administrative information (truancy, behaviour)

- ▶ **Teacher's** assessment of parents' involvement and children effort and behaviour



Parental involvement

	VOLONTEERS		NON-VOLONTEERS	
	Treated class	Control class	Treated class	Control class
Involvement score	0.157**	0.005	0.01	-0.013

Involvement score summarizes measures of involvement at home (eg monitor homeworks), involvement at school (eg meetings attendance) and perceptions (eg satisfied with the school)

It is normalized to 0 and reads as % of standard error



Parental involvement

- ▶ Increase about 10% to 30% of a standard-deviation
- ▶ Same order of magnitude as between white-collar and blue-collar families
- ▶ No spillover between parents
- ▶ Effect on parents translates into significant improvement in pupils' behavior



Pupils' behavior and cognitive outcomes

	VOLONTEERS		NON-VOLONTEERS	
	Treated	Control	Treated	Control
Truancy (1/2 days)	3.116**	4.173	3.706**	4.245
Discipl. sanctions	6.4%**	11.0%	9.1%**	11.5%
Good behaviour	35.5%**	29.0%	39.4%**	34.8%

- ▶ Some impact on teachers' marks (may reflect behaviour in part)
- ▶ No impact on normalized, externally marked tests (but kids may have no incentive to perform)



Take away

- ▶ The programme has demonstrated effects on parental involvement and child behaviour
- ▶ The behavior of all students in the selected classes improved, including those whose parents did not participate
- ▶ Impacts can be considered quite large, although treatment is light



Policy implication

- ▶ Important issue but limited political action
- ▶ Simple and inexpensive program
- ▶ Rigorous evaluation: can convince schools or governments that such action is worth taking
- ▶ Spillover effects imply that program is desirable even if a minority participates or not the primary target
- ▶ Generalization going on in France, experiment in Chile

