DOES PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT REALLY IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?
Results of a RCT

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The study

- **AIM:** Assessing the effectiveness of Family Group Conferences (FGCs) in increasing students well-being and academic performance, thanks to stronger parental involvement in their educational process.

- **WHERE:** 8 small cities near Milano – Italy.

- **WHO:** 261 students (6th/7th grade).

- **WHEN:** Started in 2013 and ended in 2015 (intervention delivered during the second term of s.y. 2013/14).
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MODEL
The Family Group Conference model

FGC is a decision making and planning process whereby the wider family group makes plans and decisions for children and young people who have been identified either by the family themselves or by service providers as being in need of plans that will safeguard and promote their welfare. (Ashley et al.)
The Family Group Conference process

- Referral
- Facilitator

Meeting preparation and family engagement

The FGC meeting:
1. sharing information
2. family private time
3. plan agreement

Plan implementation

FGC review meeting
FGC – key features

- Light welfare intervention
- Voluntary and participatory process
- Child-centred
- Family-led (empowerment, expertise by experience)
- Based on the strength of the family network
- Focused on devising practical solutions
PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS
Previous Studies on FGC effectiveness

- Mainly in the field of child protection
- Weak evidence: quite often based on small scale studies and strong assumptions (i.e. matching)
- Mixed results

  Positive: Crompton (2003); Marsh & Dawn (2007)
  Null: Wheeler & Johnson (2003); Hayden (2009)
  Negative: Sundell & Vinnerliung (2004) higher rates of re-referral to child protection services; Weigensberg et al. (2009) more connection with social services, during the first 36 months; Brown (2001) cancelled because of the impossibility to recruit a sufficient number of subjects.
THE PROJECT
A new setting: FGCs in schools

- Parents could hardly solve children’s problems, when they themselves are at the origin of those troubles.

- The FGC model could be better used to cope with light problems, with a preventive attitude.

- FGCs were proposed in the school environment to address educational issues (Family-school conferences) and to prevent the insurgence of more severe problems (drop-out, etc.) at school.
FGCs in schools

- Teachers from 14 schools were asked to refer about 350 6th or 7th grade students to be randomly included in the program.

- Students should have experienced light difficulties in relationships, behaviour or performance ("grey zone only": children with severe problems were excluded).
THE POPULATION AND THE RANDOMIZED STUDENTS
Teachers referred 261 students (they were asked 350) out of a population of 2,581.

Students referred are more frequently:

- males (66% versus 50% for the whole population)
- not Italian (36% vs 18%)
- living in single parent families (25% vs 14%)
- displaying previous school failure (23% vs 6%)
- with lower cultural, social and economic background.

(All differences statistically significant at the usual levels)

They fit the profile of «high drop-out risk students».
Randomized students and compliance

- Referred students (261) were **stratified** according to group of schools, gender and nationality (italian or not); then **randomly assigned to treatment and control** within each group.

- Randomized and treated students are **balanced** on all available covariates (social, educational and economic background, previous school failure, single parent family, grade, etc).

- Most families assigned to treatment complied to the assignment (83 out of 131), but **non compliance** was quite high (48 students).
OUTCOME VARIABLES AND DATA COLLECTION
Well-being dimensions (1)

Well-being is a multidimensional concept (Coleman, 2009) that was investigated from different points of view and different areas.

1. Support from parents in school activities;
2. Relationships with parents and family;
3. Relationships with teachers;
4. Comfort at school;
5. Behaviour at school;
Some dimensions of well-being - areas 1 to 4, or «soft-outcomes» - were implemented using self-assessed measures, collected through questionnaires administered to the whole population (2,581 students) in three stages:

**Baseline:** October 2013;
**Post:** May 2014;
**Follow up:** May 2015.
Well-being dimensions (3)

Other dimensions – areas 5 and 6, or «hard outcomes» - were implemented using administrative data provided by schools, or by the Ministry of Education (for randomized students only).

Variables measured before the treatment (baseline, at the end of first term), after the treatment (post, end of second term), and at the end of 8th grade (follow-up; data per 6th graders not available yet).
DATA ANALYSIS
Models

- **ITT**: (probability) linear regression model, controlling for randomization groups and pre-intervention outcome measures (cluster robust standard error - class level):

  \[ \text{Post-outcome} = f(\text{randomized, pre-outcome, group}) \]

- **ATT**: instrumental variables regression model (randomization as instrument).
Support with homework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Short term</th>
<th>Long-term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ITT</td>
<td>ATT</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Effect size</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>People helping with homework</td>
<td>+0.40***</td>
<td>+0.60***</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Probability linear models</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Often help from father w/ homework</td>
<td>+3p.p.</td>
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# Relationships with parents

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Short term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effect size</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support from parents</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
<td>+0.22*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships w/ parents</td>
<td>+0.24**</td>
<td>+0.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction in relationships w/ parents</td>
<td>+0.28***</td>
<td>+0.42***</td>
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<td><strong>Probability linear models</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement of relationships w/ parents</td>
<td>+2p.p.</td>
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## Relationships with teachers

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<td>ITT</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Effect size</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust in teachers</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support from teachers</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination from teachers</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>-0.40***</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Probability linear models</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved family/teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved student/teacher</td>
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## Comfort at school

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<tr>
<td>Effect size</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative emotions at schools</td>
<td>-0.24*</td>
<td>-0.36**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction for schools performance</td>
<td>+0.18</td>
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<td>+0.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressive behaviour at school</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
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<td>-0.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships w/ peers</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>+0.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>No interest in school</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
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<td>-0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive self-efficacy</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional self-efficacy</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
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<td>-0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total self-efficacy</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.01</td>
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**Probability linear models**

Behaviour at school

- No effect on any measured variable in the short term:
  - Marks for behaviour at school
  - Number of complaints
  - Number of days absent from school
Academic performance

- No effect on any measured variable in the short term:
  - Marks in Italian language
  - Marks in mathematics
  - Marks in foreign language
  - Number of failure marks

- No effect on any measured variable in the long term:
  - Final marks in Italian, math and foreign language
  - Final mark in the standardized national test
  - Drop out rate
Some conclusions

- FGCs (and randomization) are viable in Italian schools and FGCs are fairly well accepted by parents.
- FGCs were quite effective in increasing parental involvement and in improving student’s attitudes toward teachers and learning, in the short term.
- In the longer term, most effects disappear, but the relations within family improve.
- No effect whatsoever on «hard outcomes».
- Hints of impacts’ heterogeneity among males/females and natives/not natives.
Future actions

- Increase the trial size

- Observe results in the longer term (a couple of more years) through administrative data (drop-out rate becomes more significant at 9th and 10th grades, more standardized test will be available)
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION!