

To Learn

The Importance of Showing Up

Introduction

For this group presentation, we have chosen the article *"To Learn - The Importance of Showing Up"* retrieved from *"More Than Good Intentions"* by Dean Karlan and Jacob Appel addressing the issue of development and poverty by looking at the importance of education. We will start off by giving a brief summary of the article before discussing key takeaways and give our personal opinions. At the end of our presentation, we will present some questions to open up for class discussions.

Summary

The article introduces the topic of poverty by opening up with a story about Anthony; a teenage boy from a small village in central Ghana wanting to enroll in tertiary education because of the opportunities that come with it. Anthony's parents have put all the eggs in one basket meaning that they invested in him to educate and earn enough money to send his younger siblings to school. The story about Anthony is central throughout the article and addresses a central issue with poverty and education, one of the main issues being the price of education.

For many poor, the reason for not sending their children to school is the price of the tuition fees. Moreover, another important reason why many poor families do not send their children to school is because of opportunity costs of not having to study. In other words, the money a student could be earning if not having to study. Furthermore, the article mentions that in the case where there are no tuition fees for enrolling in education, free schooling is not free due to the regular explicit cost for uniforms, textbooks, pens as well as additional charges for tests and exam preparations. The burden of these ancillary costs is the reason why many poor children are not attending school.

Michael Kremer tested this theory in western Kenya by offering free uniforms to some of the children. The results showed that, over the course of three years, the children who had received uniforms through the sponsorship program came to school more often than those who had not received a uniform. Moreover, the same basics were tested in the Progres program in Mexico where parents of poor children receive "conditional cash transfers" if their children maintain a minimum of 85% attendance at school. The findings from the program showed that eligible students in participating communities were less likely to drop out. In other words, the program was a huge success and has inspired other cost-reducing programs in other countries, such as The Subsidios program.

After witnessing the success of the Progres/Oportunidades program in Mexico, The Subsidios program was launched in Bogota, Colombia. This was based on the same principles but included some tweaks. There were launched two variations of the program. In the first variation one third of the payment was withheld until the student reenrolled for another year of studies. The second variation included the same conditions as the first, but there was also a bonus for graduating. If the student enrolled in tertiary education the bonus was given immediately, if not, the bonus was handed out a year later. For tertiary studies, the basic variation from Mexico didn't influence the enrollment rate, the first variation on the other hand doubled it, while the second variation tripled the enrollment rate.

The paper also addresses an unexpected way researcher managed to decrease the absence rate in Kenya by a quarter. Simply by handing out deworming pills to the students. The project included 75 schools. Even though 80% of the parents signed their children up for the pill, it had a positive effect on the whole society. Since there were generally less parasites even the un-medicated children were less sick. The program halved the number of infections for only 3.5\$ each year per child. Compared to the Progesa program which costs 1000\$, this was revolutionary.

Another challenge regarding schools in rural areas is to have enough good teachers. Inspections from India showed that one fourth of the teachers were missing and that of the ones who showed up, only half of them were teaching. An experiment which combined monitoring and incentives was tested and after a few adjustments they came up with a solution. They made one of the students take a picture with the teacher and the class at the beginning and end of each day. By using disposable cameras that marked the date and time, administrators could verify the teacher's attendance. Their salary was then set at a low wage for ten or less days of attendance, for every day of attendance after ten, it increased by a certain amount. This halved the absence of Teachers from 42% till 21% and control visits showed that the teachers actually were teaching the students. This was also confirmed by increasing test scores from the students.

In Mumbai, the main issue was that the schools were missing teachers. To address the problem the Indian NGO, "Pratham" arranged a development program with several schools. The solution was to give the lowest-achieving students two hours a day lectures with a private teacher, hired and trained by Pratham. Then it was tested whether the program was working, by comparing test scores over two years in 350 schools. The findings showed that the students did better, and the Pratham training corresponded to half a year of regular schooling.

So, what about the students that did not get private teaching? There are a lot of arguments that fewer pupils lead to more learning, after it is easier to meet the individual needs. In addition, when the students are at the same level, the teacher can focus on teaching on the level of the students, and not teach in the middle. This dividing after ability is called tracking. However, in the Mumbai project where the division of the classes led to tracking, there are shown no effect on the remaining students. Therefore, a RCT was done to isolate the impact of tracking. Half of the schools based the sections on the grades from the previous term (tracking), the remaining schools were randomly assigned to sections. The result showed that in the tracking schools, students' test scores improved more. Also, in the schools that did not offer private lessons, thereby it also benefits the lower achievers.

A survey of children aged seven to fourteen, from the school system in Uttar Pradesh, India, showed that 1/7 could not recognize a letter, 1/3 could not read numbers and 2/3 could not read a short story written for first graders. More shocking was that only a third of the parents knew about the problem. Pratham, the largest Indian educational NGO, partnered up with researchers to test three programs, to improve the numbers. They arranged meetings to discuss the state of education and let villagers assess the level of students' learning. In the second program, they additionally learned a tool to track the progress in students' achievement over time. The last program had all the same factors; however, the villagers were encouraged to set up reading camps for local students. The findings showed that the meetings were well-attended, however there was no increase in hiring of teachers, no change in parents' engagement and no change in student and

teacher attendance. On the bright side there were established reading camps, where children who could not identify a letter, now managed.

Key takeaways

This article addresses the two main ingredients in education; students and teachers, and shows the importance of conducting rigorous tests and evaluation to find out what makes education tick. The cases elaborated on in the article shows that innovative measures such as deworming programs, implementing an incentivising program for teachers and organizing reading camps can actually have severe outcomes on education of the poor, but however, this is just the beginning of the process of finding the perfect recipe for education.

Personal opinions/comments

We find this article very intriguing as it illustrates how innovative ideas happening outside the classroom can actually have a severe effect on the education of the poor and the returns on education in general. Moreover, we find it particularly interesting how solving basic health issues can have a great impact on the returns of education.

Furthermore, as we have discussed in previous lectures, the poverty trap is a general problem which is created when a significant amount of money is required to escape poverty. In this case, many families cannot send their children to school because of lack of resources and because the opportunity cost of studying is more valuable in the present – earning money to care for the family. This article makes us think about the poverty trap and how implementing innovative solutions can reduce the amount of poor families being trapped in this position, again illustrating the importance of testing the field and evaluating the outcomes in an attempt to reduce poverty.

Questions for class/discussion

- Do you have any ideas for innovative ways to improve the attendance of students in developing countries?
- Do you have any ideas for innovative ways to improve the attendance of teachers in developing countries?
- Do you think any of the solutions mentioned in this paper (free uniforms, deworming pills, incentives for attendance) could have an effect on attendance in Thailand?

(Vi kan sammenligne med Norge, tror ikke det ville hatt stor effekt?)

- Are there any incentives for attendance or enrollment for teachers or students in Thailand?