THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF LOW-ACHIEVING CHILDHOOD PEERS: EVIDENCE FROM PROJECT STAR

Jan Bietenbeck
Lund University

Abstract
This paper evaluates how sharing a kindergarten classroom with low-achieving repeaters affects the long-term educational performance of regular first-time kindergarten students. Exploiting random assignment of teachers and students to classes in Project STAR, I document three sets of causal impacts: students who are exposed to repeaters (1) score lower on a standardized math test at the end of kindergarten, an effect that fades out in later grades; (2) show persistent improvements in non-cognitive skills such as effort and discipline; and (3) are more likely to graduate from high school and to take a college entrance exam around the age of eighteen. I argue that the positive spillovers on long-term educational attainment are driven by the differential accumulation of non-cognitive skills by repeater-exposed students during childhood. Results are consistent with the hypothesis that the improvements in these skills are driven by behavioral adjustments of teachers to the presence of repeaters in the classroom. (JEL: I21, I24)

The editor in charge of this paper was Daniele Paserman.

Acknowledgments: This paper is a revised version of a chapter of my Ph.D. dissertation. I am very grateful to David Dorn for his guidance and support. I also thank Joseph Altonji, Manuel Arellano, David Autor, Manuel Bagues, Sascha Becker, Samuel Bentolila, Susan Dynarski, Joshua Goodman, Bryan Graham, Alessandro Martinello, Claudio Michelacci, Pedro Mira, Magne Mogstad, Luca Repetto, Jan Stuhler, Petra Thiemann, Simon Wiederhold, the editor, several anonymous referees, and numerous seminar and conference audiences for helpful comments. Diane Schanzenbach generously provided a subset of the data used in this paper. Funding from the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (BES-2011-050947) is gratefully acknowledged.

E-mail: mail@janbietenbeck.com

Journal of the European Economic Association
Preprint prepared on 5 November 2018 using jeea.cls v1.0.