Early Grade Reading Sustainability Framework

Hank Healey, Senior Education Scientist, RTI International
fhhealeyiii@gmail.com

Overview

1. Introduction: why this is important
2. The basic nature of an evidence-based EGR program
3. The notion of a learning coherent core functions EGR curriculum implementation system
4. The framework
5. The nature of the work to be done

Introduction

- Since USAID put forth its goal of producing 100M readers, **many evidence-based Early Grade Reading (EGR)** programs have been developed
- Given these successful pilots, multiple efforts are unfolding to bring the impact of these programs to more and more children in the countries in which these pilots were incubated: **they are being scaled**
- **What happens once these scaling efforts come to an end?** What measures are being taken during scaling to enable the host country government to sustain the EGR effort once taken to scale?
- While many of these scaling projects address the issue of sustainability**, our review of several scaling efforts shows that those measures, while important, are insufficient.** Capacity building (training), working *through* government systems, changing 1-2 policies per year, re-writing the Grade 1-3 reading standards and curriculum, and/or getting the MOE to formally adopt project-developed curriculum materials, are/is not enough.

Evidence-Based EGR Programs

- Reflect on what many evidence-based EGR programs do:
  A. Develop best practice EGR curriculum (learning standards)
  B. Develop best practice EGR curriculum materials
  C. Distribute the materials to the end users
  D. Develop best practice training programs/materials and train the teachers and the coaches
  E. Develop classroom observation tools
  F. Coach teachers using these tools
  G. Assess students to see how the intervention is working vis-à-vis improved learning outcomes

Evidence-Based EGR Programs

But most EGR programs do more that this. They

H. Ensure that the curriculum materials, training programs, classroom observation tools, and student assessment instruments are **coherent** with best practice curriculum learning standard

I. Ensure that the materials **arrive on time, coaches coach**, and that all teachers who need to be trained are trained

J. Collect classroom observation data and use it to **identify teachers in need and provide targeted support**; they may also use this data to provide follow-up training based on needs manifest across a number of teachers

K. **Analyze** and use student assessment data to make course corrections in the project: to ensure continued and improved learning outcomes

L. Hold most actors **accountable**

M. Orient the entire project toward **improved learning outcomes**

Evidence-Based EGR Programs

When one reflects on all of this (A-M), one realizes the following:

- First, the projects achieve a level of being **coherent for learning** (Pritchett , 2015; Fullan, 2016)
  - The curriculum materials, teacher training programs and materials, coach training, coaching tools, and student assessment instruments are **all aligned** with the learning standards outlined in the curriculum.
  - Everyone in the project is working to improve student learning outcomes

Evidence-Based EGR Programs

- Second, the projects are operating as a ***Core Functions system*** (Crouch and DeStefano, 2015)
  - Learning **expectations** are communicated *to* all actors
  - Learning expectations are also communicated *through* the curriculum materials, training programs and materials, coaching and coaching tools, and student assessment instruments
  - **Support is provided** to help ensure that these learning expectations can being met (textbooks arrive on time, coaches are coaching, resources are in place for the effort to work, etc.)
  - **Data is collected**, analyzed, and used to provide targeted support and to take corrective action such that the learning standards can be met
  - **People are accountable** for achieving the learning expectations **(but note…)**

Evidence-Based EGR Programs

- Third, the projects are operating as an ***efficient curriculum implementation system***
  - The *curriculum is being well-implemented*: sufficient materials arrive on time, teachers are trained on time, teachers show up for class and teach largely as they were trained to teach, coaches show up and provide the support that is needed, classroom observation data is collected and used; student assessment data is collected and used; corrective actions are taken based on that data
  - Teachers are striving to ensure that their students are meeting the learning objectives outlined in the curriculum.

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

An EGR Sustainability Framework

Given this,

- The learning gains associated with the evidence-based EGR program were generated by a project that did much if not all of the above.
- We therefore say that a *learning coherent, Core Functions, EGR curriculum implementation system* generated the learning gains.
- Accordingly, if the host country government is to sustain EGR, we maintain that its "EGR system" must function as a learning coherent Core Functions EGR curriculum implementation system

The EGR Sustainability Framework

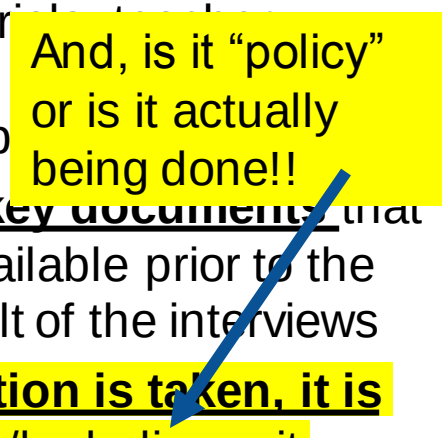
This being the case, **what must one do to enable a government to sustain EGR once taken to scale**?

- **Map the existing EGR system** to determine the extent to which it functions (does not function) as a learning coherent Core Functions EGR system
  - Through this mapping effort, **identify the institutional, systemic, organizational, and behavioral gaps**/barriers that prevent the existing system from functioning in this manner
- With these gaps/barriers identified, **work with the MOE to delineate the means by which those gaps/barriers can be filled**/removed
- Work with the MOE to put those **means into a plan**: an EGR sustainability plan
- Support the MOE to implement this plan

Mapping

Mapping framework

- The mapping exercise should unveil the various institutional, systemic, organizational, and behavioral gaps and barriers that prevent a government's existing EGR system from functioning as a learning coherence Core Functions EGR curriculum implementation system.
- One should conduct **guided interviews** with key staff members associated with the following functions: curriculum, curriculum materials, teacher training, coaching/supervision, and student assessment. [illegible] conduct guided interviews with coaches, teachers, and p[illegible]
- Parallel to these guided interviews, one should **review key documents** that outline the work of the EGR system; some should be available prior to the interviews, some will become known/available as a result of the interviews
- During the interviews, **when someone says that an action is taken, it is important to ask why**: is the actor doing this because s/he believes it should be done (good practice), or because it is in their job description, or there is a protocol that directs them to do it, etc.
- **If** an action is **not** taken, one should ask **why**: is there not a protocol that directs them to do it, is there a protocol that directs them to do it but it is largely ignored, lack of funds, etc.



Mapping

Mapping framework

- **EGR System:** what does it look like, how does it function, how well does it function
  - What is the overall **quality of the learning standards**, curriculum materials, curriculum materials delivery system, teachers, teacher training, coaching/supervision, student assessment
  - What is the **capacity** of the teacher training system, coaching system, book publishing and distribution system, data systems
  - How much teacher **absenteeism** is there
  - Is there an **attendance** problem
  - To what extent is the **budget** an issue; what does the existing budget current buy

Mapping

Mapping framework

- **Coherence**
  - How “learning coherent” is the existing system
    - Do teacher training programs train **teachers to teach the curriculum**
    - Does the national assessment system how well the **learning standards** have been met
    - Does the **textbook reflect the learning standards**
    - Do actors in the system see their work contributing to improved learning outcomes
  - What measures are/aren’t in place to **drive coherence**
    - Is there a policy, protocol, and mechanism (i.e., a design committee) that ensures that when a curriculum has been developed/revised,
      - Teachers/coaches are trained on it?
      - Assessment instruments are adjusted to it
      - Classroom observation tools are adjusted to it

Mapping

Mapping framework:

- **Data gathering, flows, and use**
  - Key data collected/analyzed: Are they collected/analyzed; if not, why
    - Classroom observation data
    - Student assessment data
    - Materials arrivals and use data
    - Coaching data
    - Teacher absenteeism data
    - Student attendance data
  - Key data flows: Do the above data flow to actors who can act on them; if not, why
    - Does classroom observation data flow, say, to the district
    - Does national exam data flow to all actors in this EGR system
    - Etc.
  - Key data use: Is the data being used to improve system performance, if not, why
    - Do the district level coaches examine the classroom observation data is use it to identify poor performing teachers and provide targeted support?
    - Etc.

Mapping

Mapping framework:

- **Accountability**
  - Are key accountability pressures in place to help drive this core functions system?
    - What are key actors accountable for? To whom?
    - What incentives drive them to do what they do?
    - What do their job descriptions outline?
    - What are the criteria for career advancement?
    - Are actors in anyway accountable for:
      - Materials arriving on time
      - Coaching, providing targeted support
      - Improved teacher performance
      - Improved learning outcomes

Take-aways

- If a government is to sustain an evidence-based EGR program, it must be able to do much of what the EGR project did to make that program evidence-based
- Those projects tend to run **a *learning coherent*** *Core Functions EGR curriculum implementation system*
- To determine the extent to which a government's existing EGR system functions in this manner, one must **map it** against the backdrop of a learning coherent Core Functions EGR curriculum implementation system
- This mapping exercise will yield the **various gaps/barriers** that prevent the existing EGR system from functioning as a learning coherent Core Functions EGR curriculum implementation system
- Given these gaps/**barriers a plan must be developed/**implemented to fill/remove them