International Literacy Day: A Learning Agenda

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Four Main Points

- Learning profiles (learning per grade) are too low to lead to adequate competency
- Extending school alone will not be enough
- An input based approach will not be enough to raise learning
- Beyond mimetic isomorphic mimicry to systems that focus on performance

(Unless otherwise noted all graphs and data are from my forthcoming book “The Rebirth of Education” from Center for Global Development and draft chapters detailing the results are available online at http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/lpritch/)
Schooling should lead to opportunity but won’t if the learning profile is too shallow.

![Graph showing percentage correct by grade and arithmetic problems solved.](Source: APRESt (via Pritchett 2012))
## Little learning per year of schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average percentage point increase in reading/division, per year of schooling</th>
<th>Of students who couldn’t read or divide, percent who learned in next grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading (grade 2 story)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(English)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Division (one digit into three digits)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The length of the line in the figure above is 4 cm.

How long is the pencil shown in the picture? (Use the ruler shown in the picture.)

Class 4:
- 5 cm (23.0%)
- 6 cm (46.0%)

Class 6:
- 5 cm (22.1%)
- 6 cm (41.7%)

Class 8:
- 5 cm (34.7%)
- 6 cm (38.8%)

Only 7.2 percent of students clear up this fundamental confusion in four years of schooling.
Shallow learning profiles lead to low cumulative performance of school leavers.
If the learning profile is too flat just more schooling cannot reach learning goals

Using the learning profile of Ghana in 2007 even reaching universal secondary completion only increases those above a minimal threshold by 10 percentage points.
The impact of just more standard inputs is just not big enough—even doing everything desirable in “business as usual” fashion won’t be enough.

Gains from the maximum feasible expansion of all inputs at existing effect sizes on learning are in the range of .1 to .2 student standard deviations.
Mimetic Isomorphic mimicry in snakes and schools: When is a school just a building?

Camouflage of looking like a poisonous snake is a survival strategy—without the bother of being poisonous.

Camouflage of looking like a school—buildings, teachers, kids in uniform—allows public schools to survive without all the bother of educating children.
Getting better outcomes is not just “speeding up” or getting more ambitious—covering too much too fast is part of the problem.

Moving ahead in the curriculum faster than children are learning leaves many children so far behind they learn little or nothing.

Source: Pritchett and Beatty 2012
There are things out there that work—but an educational ecosystem that encourages demonstrated solutions to scale (and other to wither) is essential.

Fish swim

...mammals swim

...turtles swim

...birds swim