

Abstract

The paper explores the significance of counting communication skills in one of the earliest societies to achieve mass literacy. The Millennium Development Goals in education reflect structures of practice and thinking rooted in the 19th century. The notion of a goal itself, the measurable output of official endeavour, belongs to the founding of the modern state. Literacy as an early performance indicator of public expenditure embodied a construction of an opposition between ignorance and knowledge, a disaggregation of social structures and a dismissal of informal education. It sustained the rise of the performance orientation of schooling, which subordinated the role of users. Despite their cultural limitations, the literacy and postal statistics permitted long-run quantitative analysis. There remains a question, to which historians do not have a privileged answer, as to whether education in its fullest sense is a goal that can ever be consistently measured over time and across space. The contemporary shifts in the meaning of literacy threaten to disconnect the term from history and disable our capacity fully to understand the dynamics of change.

Keywords: Education, Literacy, State, Schooling, Teachers, Nineteenth century, Quantitative measurement, Millennium Development Goals, UNESCO

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