

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## 'The invention of counting: the statistical measurement of literacy in nineteenth-century England'

### Journal Item

How to cite:

Vincent, David (2014). 'The invention of counting: the statistical measurement of literacy in nineteenth-century England'. *Comparative Education*, 50(3) pp. 266–281.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [not recorded]

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/03050068.2014.921372>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

## **The Invention of Counting**

This talk will consider the process by which the world's first centralised, quantified, consistent time series of literacy attainments was brought into being. It will examine the methodological problems encountered by the early Registrars General and their staff and how they sought to overcome them. Their work will be placed in the context of the 'avalanche of numbers' that characterised the 1820s and 1830s. Particular attention will be paid to the difficulties with time and with networks and how the failure to resolve these influenced both contemporary and historical understandings of the dynamics of nineteenth-century literacy.