



Crucial Topics in Foundations of Education: International Perspectives

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Infrastructuring education: SDG4 and the generative power of failing metrics

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In 2015, the World Education Forum (WEF) was celebrated in Incheon, the Republic of Korea, with the participation of over 1,500 people, representing a milestone in the history of the UNESCO summitry. Similar to others prior to it, the main product of WEF 2015 was the so-called Incheon Declaration, along with the Framework for Action adopted by UNESCO Member States. In conjunction, both documents established an ambitious and highly aspirational education agenda for the period 2015-2030, condensed in the overarching goal to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”; this is the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) (UNESCO, 2016).

In the lecture, I will trace the development of the ‘epistemic infrastructure’ of the SDG4 in order to examine the ways that the incremental build-up of the discourse, technical expertise and necessary – though always fragile – alliances facilitated a paradigmatic policy shift in the field of education: this is the move from the measurement of schooling to the measurement of learning. Through an analytical lens that examines the entanglement of the material, semiotic, as well as political and temporal/spatial elements of the infrastructure, the article shows how the SDG4 as an epistemic infrastructure enabled a fundamental re-orientation in the field of global education governance. I will discuss the ways that quantification, despite –and often thanks to– its failings, ‘folded’ contested discourses, decision-making, politics and ideas into its processes. Thus, I will argue that the making of the SDG4 represents a paradigmatic policy shift; one that is not only to be traced in the move from schooling to the policy prioritisation of learning outcomes, but in the very production of global public policy through the work of the SDGs as epistemic infrastructures.