

Understanding Literacy in its Historical Contexts

Socio-Cultural History and
the Legacy of Egil Johansson

Edited by
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Introduction

Harvey J. Graff, Alison Mackinnon, Bengt Sandin & Ian Winchester

For more than thirty years the work of the Swedish Lutheran pastor and pioneering social historian Egil Johansson has astonished the international scholarly world. Working initially in the parish registers, especially the examination registers, of the little parish of Bygdeå in northern Sweden, Johansson discovered the extraordinary usefulness of a remarkable collection of documents which begins in the 1640s in the case of Bygdeå and continues into the twentieth century, covering the entire population of the parish. He used these documents to detail the history of the development of the church tradition and of universal literacy in Sweden which occurred well before any other European nation, in spite of the fact that Sweden industrialized about a century later than the European norm.

Egil Johansson's contribution to Swedish, Scandinavian, European, and North American history and social studies is even greater. Along with his students and colleagues, he stimulated and reinforced a wide range of developments in research and interpretation that are usually included under the interdisciplinary rubrics of new social and cultural history, historical demography, microhistory, the history of education, and social studies of religion. His work also influenced the social organization of research.

Johansson developed imaginative and original data analysis techniques that help historians around the world to better picture the complete human cast of the past. With the help of many doctoral students and an expanding professorial cadre, Johansson has used these documents to build a striking picture of Sweden as an example of a pre-industrial society in the thrall of independent farmers, nobility, priesthood, and a king who guided it as a great European power. His research follows Sweden's continuing historical development until the time of its emergence in the twentieth century and as a force in international industrial

development. In the process, Johansson founded a unique Demographic Database at Umeå University and a massive microfiche data collection project at Ramsele, and has inspired and attracted many historical and social scientific researchers.

Johansson's work spans many aspects of literacy and social history, and their relationship with religion and gender. An international conference entitled 'Literacy, Religion, Gender, and Social History – A Socio-Cultural History for the 21st Century: An International Conference for Egil Johansson' was held in Vadstena, Sweden on 21–24 May 2002. This conference reviewed, critiqued, and explored the possibilities for the wider circulation and broader application of central dimensions of the work inspired by Umeå. The conference participants and contributors to this book are influential social historians, historical sociologists, historians of literacy, historians of gender relations and sexuality, and philosophers as well as students of the social history of religion, drawn from Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, and the United States, and representing many universities.

Background

Egil Johansson is a singular figure in twentieth-century international social historical studies. In the 1960s he was a Lutheran pastor with no special scholarly ambitions and a growing family, working in the parish of Bygdeå in northern Sweden. He discovered some special registers in his parish church and inquired about them.

The scholarly community had nothing to say about them, not least because they were written in a complex system of codes and because information about the broad layers of population was then of little interest to nineteenth-century historians. Johansson saw the importance of a unique record of pastoral care and universal literacy kept for the entire Swedish population for more than two and a half centuries. His recognition of its unusual significance set him on a course of historical discovery and institutional development unparalleled in the twentieth century.

Johansson's discovery of the historical uses of the *husförhörslängder*, or Swedish church literacy examination records, which covered the entire population of Sweden from the middle of the seventeenth century until the early part of the twentieth century, made Sweden a major source of

inspiration and influence in the world of the latter half of the twentieth century, the rival of England, France, and the United States.

Johansson himself discovered that these examination registers in the parishes of Bygdeå and Tuna covered the entire population. Cracking the code and the complex information system in which they were written meant that researchers could interpret the judgments of generations of Lutheran pastors on the reading and comprehension abilities of all their parishioners, household by household, from cradle to grave. Babies, children, servants, those passing through, and the elderly, however old, were all included by royal proclamation. From roughly the 1640s to the early twentieth century, these records were intact for Bygdeå and Tuna. And as Johansson subsequently discovered, more or less intact for the country as a whole and its far-flung empire in the seventeenth century. Even the Swedish American colony and immigrants arriving in Delaware, Illinois, and Minnesota since the 1850s were not exempt from the church examination register process.

Internationally, most social historians have had to be content with rough and suggestive data, especially with respect to literacy. But Johansson discovered effectively complete data for an entire population, updated annually and running for centuries. This required unique ways of handling the data, unique displays of data, and original arguments regarding what, exactly, they meant. Johansson registered for doctoral study at Umeå University in the mid-1960s and produced a path-breaking doctoral dissertation about early literacy in Sweden. His appointment to a full-time lectureship in the School of Educational Research at Umeå University was a sign of appreciation of his achievements.

Johansson suggested to the university authorities and the government of the time that these records were of such value to Swedish history and culture that they required different treatment from all other Swedish records of the past. In particular, he argued, they should become machine or computer readable so that historical research would be facilitated. Furthermore, they should all be put into a machine-readable form. His statements were heard and his proposals succeeded. The founding and development of one of the greatest demographic databases devoted to historical study was established.

Egil Johansson thus established the Demographic Database in Umeå and the equally remarkable Data Registry in the Swedish-Finnish border town of Haparanda near the Arctic Circle. Allied to the history

programme at Umeå, these two institutions have gone on to provide opportunities for historians from all over Sweden and around the world to use unique Swedish data in their historical studies. Often this has been done by studying Swedish materials on research topics that cannot be examined so directly elsewhere. Sometimes it has set a benchmark for other European studies. At an early stage, Dr Jan Sundin took over the Demographic Database and began working closely with numerous research students, as did Sune Åkerman, a professor of history appointed from Uppsala.

Soon a professorship was tied to the Umeå database, the first professor being Lars Göran Tedebrand, also of Uppsala, appointed in 1982. These three figures – Sundin, Åkerman, Tedebrand – and Egil Johansson himself were important in the development of Swedish social historical research.

International scholars from Europe, the United States, Canada, China, Japan, and Australia have sought out the Demographic Database and Prof. Johansson in order to understand his ideas, his research results, and his approach to social history.

Egil Johansson's own scholarly work has been varied and influential nationally, internationally, and comparatively. Perhaps his most important work has been on the history of literacy since the seventeenth century. One of his classic articles from 1977 is included in this book. His focus centred on the programmes of the church and pastoral care as well as literacy in its historical and cultural context. In these ways, he has contributed greatly to our understanding of the history of the Swedish church, the role of women in early modern Sweden, the history of the Swedish family, and the comparative study of literacy generally. His research and his database, for example, allow students of literacy to examine more closely the relationships between families, the church, and the state; the connections between literacy and orality; the distinct dimensions of reading *and* writing in the social process of *alphabétisation*; and the complex dialectics linking literacy, institutions such as schools and churches, and political, social, and economic development. It also demonstrates some of the ways in which religious history can be reconnected with social and cultural history, including popular culture, families, gender relations, and sexuality. The Demographic Database has not only served as a model internationally, but it also has advanced the study of almost all aspects of historical demography and our understanding of vital

behaviour (fertility, mortality, migration, nuptiality) in their social historical contexts. Social, cultural, and feminist scholars are now discovering ways in which its evidence can speak to new questions on the scholarly agenda. Therein lay the agenda for the conférees and the outline of the studies reported in this book.

The conference also considered approaches and issues in research design and the conduct of electronic research in large demographic databases; questions about social theory and historical interpretation that arise from these historical approaches; and implications for social policy both historically and contemporarily.

Large-scale demographic and other historical databases are an important product of new historical and social scientific approaches and methods from the second half of the twentieth century. Their accessibility, maintenance, continuing usefulness, and future development are among the most important questions that scholars around the world face as we begin the twentyfirst-century.

The relevance of the past – this new kind of socio-cultural history – to the present and to our understanding of possible futures also calls for critical comment. In a new millennium, those relationships and the persisting question of our ability to learn from our own histories also occupies us, especially in the final phase of our collaboration.

As scholars from different disciplines and from interdisciplinary perspectives raise new questions unimagined in the past, the Demographic Database can be interrogated anew and can provide the basis for fresh answers. This is taking place now in research on literacy, fertility, families, gender, and popular culture. New questions lead to new approaches to such rich sets of data.

The conference and this book

For three days in May 2002, at the Birgitta Forum of Linköping University located in the beautiful lakeside pilgrimage town of Vadstena, Sweden, an international group of scholars influenced by the work of Egil Johansson had the opportunity to prepare, exchange, and critically discuss original papers and commentaries. The interchange involved discussions with Egil Johansson himself as well as with other conference participants from Europe, North America, and Australia.

The general topics included the uses of the Demographic Database in history, technology, and philosophy of history; literacy, orality, read-

ing and writing, and popular culture; literacy, religion, and popular culture; population processes; family history, gender relations, and sexuality; comparative history and international collaborations; the contemporary relevance of Johansson's own work and the Demographic Database, especially with relevance to large-scale demographic studies, its pitfalls and benefits; philosophical issues raised by Johansson's work (for example the separation of church and state, the conjunction of church and state, and literacy as a necessity for social development, peace, order, and good government), among other issues.

The papers collected in this book only begin to suggest the excitement and engagement of those days in May 2002 at Vadstena. In their first contributions, Kenneth Lockridge and Daniel Lindmark explore Egil Johansson's work and the influence of his legacy. Johansson's own chapter on church records and the Swedish transition to literacy exemplify the issues with the power of a historical case study. Viewing it internationally, Hanna Zipernovszky asks, 'Are the Swedish parish examination records a unique phenomenon?'

Fittingly, the contributors explore literacy using a number of fascinating perspectives, methods, and sources. Ian Winchester and Daniel Lindmark probe Swedish cultural history. Winchester considers the role of literacy in the culture of the Vikings in light of Johansson's research, while Lindmark examines reading cultures, Christianization, and secularization. In contrast, Kenneth Lockridge reviews literacy through the lens of early modern commonplace books. Social and demographic dimensions occupy Lotta Vikström who discusses women's work in nineteenth-century Sundsvall, in Sweden.

Turning to education as such, Bengt Sandin studies the establishment of an urban educational system during the period of Swedish Great Power in the light of cultural conflicts, street urchins, and new systems of surveillance. Complementing Vikström's chapter, Alison Mackinnon considers Swedish women teachers in relation to late nineteenth-century fertility transition. Pavla Miller reconsiders literacy and schooling comparatively in light of transformations in patriarchal regimes.

With examples from the history of Britain, David Mitch and David Vincent conclude the book comparatively but with different principal concerns. Pushing toward present-day issues, Mitch asks, 'How did illiterates fare as literacy became almost universal?' with data from Liverpool. Appropriately, for the turn of the twenty-first century and our struggles with the seemingly endless proliferation of proclaimed

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literacies, David Vincent takes up the theme of 'Literacy literacy' from a much needed critical perspective.

The book concludes with Harvey Graff's assessment of the history of literacy, important themes and questions of and a bibliography of the history of literacy in Europe and North America.

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Introduction to Historical Studies of Literacy

Harvey J. Graff

The study of literacy is prominent among the historical subjects that have attracted significant interdisciplinary attention, and is an established interest of social science historians and other interdisciplinary scholars across the disciplines (see, for example, Graff, 1979, 1987, 1993, 1995a, 1995b). This is the world in which Egil Johansson's research has been a seminal influence, dialectically at once a response and a shaping force. This collection of studies speaks to those relationships.

As it happens, literacy and history have much in common. Both are prone to perceptions of crisis and decline – precipitous declines that are sometimes claimed to threaten civilization as we know it. Both are susceptible to mythologization and are hard to define and measure. New interdisciplinary histories of literacy challenge those charges, among other presumptions about literacy that have been influential in many academic disciplines, in public debate, and among policymakers (see 'Recent emphases in historical literacy studies', below. See also Hirsch, 1987; Gagnon & Bradley Commission, 1989; Stearns 1991, 1993; Graff 1979, 1987, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1999b; Kaestle et al., 1991; Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

The history of literacy is an instructive example of interdisciplinary history with respect to its founding and the course of its development. It followed a path common to social science histories (see 'New Historical Literacy Studies', below; see, in general for what follows, Graff, 1987, 1995a, 1995b, 2001; Kaestle et al., 1991). On the one hand, pioneering social science historians of the 1960s and 1970s confronted a diffuse historical literature that made easy (if poorly documented)

generalizations about the distribution of literacy across populations and (even though vaguely) the great significance of literacy's presence, absence, or degree of diffusion. On the other hand, they confronted a social science literature, some of it with theoretical aspirations, generally derived from modernization approaches that placed literacy squarely among the requisites for progress by individuals and by groups. The historical writing rested on a thin base of mainly anecdotal evidence, with little concern about its accuracy or representativeness. The social science writing included modernization theories with stages and threshold levels, macrosocial correlations from aggregate data, and, occasionally, contemporary case studies. Writings in both areas treated literacy – whether conceptually or empirically – uncritically and as unproblematic. Literacy's key relationships, they assumed, were simple, linear, and direct, and its impact was universally powerful. At the same time, most scholarly writing neglected the subject of literacy even when it was highly relevant.

Critical of earlier work, the new literacy studies that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s questioned the received wisdom that tied literacy directly to individual and societal development, from social mobility (+) and criminal acts (–) to revolutions in industry (+), fertility (–), and democracy (+) (positive and negative relationships). Sceptical about modernization models and with at least some of the conclusions taken from aggregative data, researchers who come from an impressive number of nations, disciplines, and specializations were wary about imprecise formulations, levels of generalization, and their evidential basis. Critical and revisionist in intellectual orientation, a generation of scholars sought to test old and newer ideas, hypotheses, and theories with reliable and relevant data (see 'Recent emphases' and 'New historical literacy studies', below). Egil Johansson's contributions and legacies, to which this book speaks powerfully, lie here.

Specifically, this meant identifying measures of literacy that, ideally, were direct, systematic, routinely generated, longitudinal, and comparable – quantitative indicators all – and building machine-readable databases to promote their use and enhance their accessibility to other researchers. In Sweden, this meant church registers; in France, marriage and military records; in Britain, marriage and census records; and in North America, manuscript census records.

The dream of a precisely comparative history remains illusive, despite the enormous progress that demographic and social databases stimulate.

Literacy studies have taught us to make comparisons more carefully, often restricting their range. As a recognizable field of literacy studies emerged, literacy's significance as an important variable for many subjects across the realms of social science and other interdisciplinary histories was accepted. Its relevance expanded just as expectations of its universal powers were qualified and contextualized.

Earlier expectations (and theories) that literacy's contribution to shaping or changing nations, and the men and women within them, was universal, unmediated, independent, and powerful have been quashed (see 'Lessons from the history of literacy', below). Literacy – that is, literacy by itself – is now much less often conceptualized as independently transformative. On the contrary, we now anticipate and recognize its impact to be shaped by specific historical circumstances as context-dependent, complicated rather than simple, incomplete or uneven, interactive rather than determinative, and mediated by a host of other intervening factors of a personal, structural, or cultural historical nature rather than universal. In other words, literacy is a historical variable, and it is historically variable.

The chapters in this book confirm this point, including the quantitatively and more qualitatively based, the economic and the social and cultural approaches. Compare, for example, Lindmark's, Winchester's, or Lockridge's cultural perspectives with Lundberg's, Vikstrom's, MacKinnon's, or Mitch's social and economic emphases and use of numerical evidence. In one way or another, the contributors to this project also speak to this new understanding, although sometimes from very different perspectives and with different conclusions. Consider Miller or Sandin in contrast with Mitch or Vincent. Many social and critical theories play in the land of historical literacy studies.

Literacy's students now understand that the equation or synonymy of literacy acquisition with institutions that we call schools and with childhood is itself a fairly recent historical development. Other arrangements were once common. They included families, workplaces, and peer, religious, and political groups. We recognize that the environment in which one learns to read or write has a major influence on the level of ability to use and the likely use of those skills.

Social attributes (including ascribed characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, and class) and historical contexts, which are shaped by time and place, mediate literacy's impacts, for example, on chances for social or geographic mobility. Literacy seems to have a more direct influence

on longer distance migration. When established widely, that relationship will carry major implications for the historical study of both sending and receiving societies and for the immigrants. Literacy's links with economic development are both direct and indirect, multiple, and contradictory. For example, its value to skilled artisans may differ radically from its import for unskilled workers. Literacy levels sometimes rise as an effect rather than a cause of industrialization. Industrialization may depress literacy levels through its negative impact on schooling chances for the young, while over a longer term its contribution may be more positive.

Experiences of learning literacy include cognitive and noncognitive influences. This is not to suggest that literacy should be construed as any less important, but that its historical roles are complicated and historically variable. Today, it is difficult to generalize broadly about literacy as a historical factor. But that only makes it a more compelling subject. (See 'Lessons from the history of literacy', below.)

Literacy studies have succeeded in establishing a new historical field where there was none. Statistical time series developed for many geographic areas and historical eras limit cavalier generalizations about literacy rates and their meanings, whether by demographers, economists, linguists, or literary historians. Three decades of scholarship have transformed how interdisciplinary historians and many other students conceptualize literacy. Both contemporary and historical theories that embrace literacy are undergoing major revision because of this body of research and recent studies that point in similar directions. The view that literacy's importance and influences depend on specific social and historical contexts – which, in effect, imply that literacy's impacts are mediated and restricted, that its effects are social and particular, and that literacy must be understood as one among a number of communication media and technologies – replaces a unquestioned certainty that literacy's powers were universal, independent, and determinative.

Literacy's historians know how recently these ideas about literacy's transforming and developmental powers were central to theories that held sway in major areas of economics, demography, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history. The challenge to probe previous understandings with suitable historical data and test the strong theories of literacy attests to the contributions that interdisciplinary history can make. Here Egil Johansson led the way.

The emergence of literacy as an interdisciplinary field for contempo-

rary scholars opens the way for a richer exchange between historians and other researchers for the mutual reshaping of inquiry past, present, and future that is part of the promise of literacy's history. Historical studies of literacy, finally, contribute to public discourse, debate, and policy talk internationally. The many crucial points of intersection include the demonstration that no golden age for literacy ever existed, that there are multiple paths to literacy for individuals and societies, that quantitative measures of literacy do not translate easily to qualitative assessments, that the environment in which literacy is learned affects the usefulness of the skills, that the connections between literacy and inequality are many, and that the constructs of literacy (its learning and its uses) are usually conceived far too narrowly.

Historians of literacy need to bring their criticisms and new conclusions to audiences throughout the academy and beyond. Along with other historians, they need to confront the limitations of two generations of study of primarily numerical records as they continue to build on that achievement. They need to probe the nature of literacy as a historical subject and variable. In part, they can do this by bridging the present gap between the history of literacy and new research on printing, publishing, and readership on the one hand, and new perspectives in the humanities, anthropology, and psychology on the other hand. Literacy studies join other interdisciplinary histories in exploring new approaches to society and culture through narrative, feminist theories, literary theories, critical theory, and many other connections across the human sciences in the early twenty-first century.

The following lists provide useful orientations in and synopses of the developing field of literacy studies. Completing our introductory overview, they survey in outline form the basics of recent emphases in historical studies of literacy, the new historical studies of literacy, and lessons from the history of literacy. The first two are elaborated throughout the chapters that follow. The last is developed in the final chapter 'Assessing the History of Literacy'.

Recent emphases in historical literacy studies

- Economic history – greater criticism, greater efforts at more precise specification
- Demography – to a lesser extent but more subtly
- Readers and their readings: impacts, difference/differentiation

- Learning literacy(ies)/using literacy(ies) including levels, limits, contexts, practice, performance
- Ethnographies of literacy in practice
- Deconstructions of literacy as promotion, expectation, ideology, theory
- Multiple literacies and multi-media contexts (including multi-lingual)
- Reading/textuality/criticism/reader response/literary theory
- Publishing and distribution/circulation/communications
- Religion: influences and impacts, consequences
- Cultures, high, middling, popular, etc. – intersections, interactions, separations
- Reading and writing: creation, expression, performance
- History of emotions
- Political culture/political action
- Gender, social class, race, ethnicity, generation
- Connecting past, present, and future

New historical literacy studies

- Historical literacy studies must build upon their own past while also breaking away from it: sharper contextual grounding; time series; linkages, and interrelationships.
- Comparative studies.
- New conceptualizations of context for study and interpretation including material conditions, motivations, opportunities, needs and demands, traditions, transformations, historical ‘ethnographies,’ and micro-histories.
- Critical examination of the conceptualization of literacy itself – beyond independent and dependent variables.
- Literacy and the ‘creation of meaning’ – linguistic and cultural turns, reading, and so on; for example, transformation of cultural and intellectual history and the history of the book.
- Sharper theoretical awareness of the relevance of the history of literacy for many important aspects of social, economic, and psychological theory; history as testing ground for theories.
- Has the tradition of taking literacy as primary object of analysis – ‘the history of literacy’ – approached its end point? From the history of literacy to ‘literacy in history’?

- Policy issues: social problems, development paths, costs and consequences, alternatives and understandings.

Lessons from the history of literacy

- The historicity of literacy constitutes a first theme from which many other key imperatives and implications follow. Reading and writing take on meaning and acquire value only in concrete historical circumstances that mediate in specific terms whatever general or supposedly 'universal' attributes may be claimed for literacy.
- That subjects such as literacy, learning, and schooling, and the uses of reading and writing are simple, unproblematic notions is a historical myth. Experience, historical and more recent, underscores – practically and theoretically – their enormously complicated conceptual and highly problematic nature.
- Typical conceptions of literacy share not only assumptions about their unproblematic status, but also the presumption of the central value neutrality. Historical literacy studies demonstrate that no means, modes or learning are neutral – all incorporate the assumptions and expectations, biases or emphases of production, association, prior use, transmission, maintenance, and preservation.
- Historical studies document the human costs that follow from the domination of the practical and theoretical presumptions that elevate the literate to the status of the dominant partner in what Jack Goody calls the 'Great Dichotomy' and Ruth Finnegan the 'Great Divide'.
- Hand in hand with simplicity and superiority have gone presumed ease of learning and expectation of individual along with societal progress. Historical studies reiterate the difficulties experienced in gaining, practicing, and mastering the seldom easy elements of alphabetic literacy; learning literacy, and whatever lies beyond it, has always been hard work.
- Multiple paths of learning literacy, employment of an extraordinary range of instructors, institutions, environments, and beginning texts, and diversity of conflicting or contradictory motivations pushing and pulling. Very simple notions and images. Long transformation to twentieth-century notions that tie literacy acquisition to childhood.
- Expectations and common practices of learning literacy as part of elementary education are themselves historical developments. The

presumption holds that given the availability of written texts and elementary instruction, basic abilities of reading and writing are in themselves sufficient for further developing literacy and education. Failure reflects overwhelmingly on the individual.

- Just as individuals followed different paths to literacy and learning, societies historically and more recently took different paths toward achieving rising levels of popular literacy. There was no one route to universal literacy and its associated 'modern' concomitants.

See also Harvey J. Graff, 'Assessing the History of Literacy in the 1990s: Themes and Questions,' on pp. 243–264.

Notes

- 1 First is a full-length exposition of the historiography and history of literacy, first presented as 'Assessing the History of Literacy in the 1990s: Themes and Questions,' a plenary address to the conference on Writing and Reading in Western Europe, Valencia, Spain, 1993 (Graff, 1995b). This essay appears in this book with an updated bibliography.
- 2 To carry the story forward I turned to another presentation, from 'The Shock of the "New" (Histories)': Social Science Histories and Historical Literacies,' my presidential address to the 25th Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2000 (Graff, 2001). These pages provide a succinct introduction to the field. In a slightly revised form, they appear below.
- 3 Here I also include a summary of 'Recent emphases in historical literacy studies,' prepared for the conference, and two other lists that outline the core of 'Assessing the History of Literacy in the 1990s: Themes and Questions,' 'Lessons from the history of literacy,' and 'New historical literacy studies.' See also my edited collection *Literacy and Historical Development* (Graff 2007).

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The History of Literacy in Sweden*

Egil Johansson

The reading tradition in Sweden and Finland

It has been difficult in the past to make the history of Swedish literacy known and accepted in other countries. A typical statement on this matter was made by Carl af Forsell in his *Statistik över Sverige* (*Swedish Statistics*) 1833, which is full of useful information:

Most foreign geographies and statistical works, for example those of Stein, Hassel, Crome, Malte Brun and others, maintain that the lower classes in Sweden can neither read nor write. As for the first statement, it is completely false, since there is not one in a thousand among the Swedish peasantry who cannot read. The reason for this is principally the directives of Charles XI that a person who is not well acquainted with his Bible should not be allowed to take Holy Communion and that a person who is not confirmed should not be allowed to get married. One might nowadays readily add that, in order to be confirmed, everyone should be able to prove that, besides reading from a book, he also possessed passable skills in writing and arithmetic. Even if in other respects the cottage of the farmer or the crofter gives evidence of the highest poverty it will, nevertheless, nearly always contain a hymn-book, a Bible, a collection of sermons and sometimes several other devotional manuals. The English Lord Chancellor, Brougham, said in Parliament on 1 May 1816, that in the previous six years 9,765 couples had been married in Manchester among whom not a single person could either read or write. According to the *Revue Encyclopedique* of October 1832,

74 adolescents out of a 100 in the northern departments of France could read, whilst in the western ones it was 12 out of a 100, and in the whole country only 38 out of a 100.

Af Forsell rejects indignantly foreign opinions about the low status of literacy in Sweden at the same time as he strikes back by referring to low figures for England and France. The problem is still of interest. It is still difficult for foreign observers to understand what has happened in Sweden, owing to the special nature of the Swedish and Finnish reading tradition.

Firstly, the ability to read gained ground much earlier than the ability to write, whereas these two abilities have followed each other closely in most other countries. Secondly, people were persuaded to learn to read by means of a specific campaign initiated for political and religious reasons; in the reign of Charles XI the Church Law of 1686, for example, contained a ruling concerning general literacy. Thirdly, this reading campaign was forced through almost completely without the aid of proper schools. The responsibility for teaching children to read was ultimately placed on the parents. The social pressure was enormous. Everybody in the household and in the village gathered once a year to take part in examinations in reading and knowledge of the Bible. Any adult who failed these examinations was excluded from both communion and marriage.

These are the distinctive features that af Forsell points to as being traditionally Swedish. He hints, moreover, by referring to the large number of books, at the literate environment in these poor households. His statements are, of course, too optimistic in their generalizations about the ability to read as a whole. But his argument is typical of the dilemma, which still prevails, of presenting the Swedish tradition internationally.

This dilemma is such as to make one more voice necessary. This very distinctive reading tradition was, as it happens, also observed by foreign travellers. The Scottish evangelist, John Patterson, writes about his trip to Sweden in 1807–8:

From Malmoe I paid a visit to my friend, Dr. Hylander, in Lund, made the acquaintance of the bishop and some of the professors, and enlarged my knowledge of Sweden. As Dr. Hylander had a parish not far from Malmoe, I one day went with him to attend an examination of his parishioners. It was held in a peasant's house, in

a large hall, where a goodly number were collected. The people, old and young, answered the questions put to them readily in general; those who were deficient in their knowledge were severely dealt with, and exhorted to be more diligent. On the whole the exercise was calculated to be useful. It was a pleasing circumstance that all could read. Indeed, this may be affirmed of the inhabitants of all the northern Protestant Kingdoms; you seldom meet one above ten or twelve who cannot read, and the most of them write their own language; yet at the time now referred to, there was nothing like what we have in Scotland, a provision for the education of the people by means of parochial schools. The parents were the teachers of their children, till they reached the age of fourteen or thereabouts, when they attended the pastor or his assistant, to be prepared for confirmation and being admitted to the Lord's Supper. And as no person can be confirmed till he can read and repeat his catechism, or, until confirmed, can give his oath in a court of justice, or get married, a great disgrace is attached to not being able to read; indeed, one who cannot read is nobody in the eye of the law. This state of things has its advantages, as far as education is concerned; but, alas! it has its disadvantages, as it admits all to the enjoyment of religious privileges, and thereby tends to make a nation of religious formalists. After the examination was over, all the heads of families sat down to a sumptuous dinner provided for the occasion, and which gave me a little more insight into Swedish society among the peasantry. I was much pleased with the whole, and thanked my friend for the opportunity then offered me of seeing more of the people.

Patterson commented approvingly on education for the masses in Sweden. The ability to read was a general accomplishment. School instruction did not, however, exist in the same way as in Scotland. Parents were instead responsible for the teaching of their children. The result was supervised by means of a system of examinations held by the clergy, which, however, according to Patterson, led to a certain degree of religious formalism. Thus, the various features of education for the masses in Sweden were also observed by Patterson.

Another traveller, the German ecclesiastical historian Friedrich Wilhelm von Schubert, had the same impressions as Patterson during his tour of Sweden and Finland in 1811. He observed that the ability to read gained more ground after the first decade of the eighteenth

century. Von Schubert has, as a matter of fact, presented one of the most detailed descriptions of the custom of church examinations in Sweden and Finland.

The reading tradition in Sweden and Finland is also a problem for af Forsell's successors in the field of statistics today. The difficulty of comparing Sweden and Finland with other countries has, in reality, increased over the years.

Since the Second World War the accepted model has been to regard it as necessary that reading and writing should follow each other closely, that formal school instruction should be almost the only conceivable teaching method, and that economic models should provide us with a decisive explanation of a functioning literate environment. A general ability to read in a poor, pre-industrial, agrarian, developing country like Sweden or Finland seems a sheer absurdity. The notion that the ability to read gained ground much earlier than the ability to write is completely foreign to this approach.

A typical expression of this contemporary outlook on the ability to read is given in the treatment of literacy in the Finnish censuses of 1880–1930. The figure for the adults who could neither read nor write was, according to these censuses, constantly lower than two per cent. These figures constituted, as late as the 1930s, no major problem for the statisticians in the League of Nations. They quoted the number of illiterate people in Finland in 1930 at 0.9 per cent.¹

The Finnish authorities were, however, already worried by inquiries about the meaning of these figures. As a result of this, the next census unfortunately included no information about cultural attainment because of obscurities when making international comparisons.

After the war UNESCO's statisticians were even harsher.² Those who were only able to read were classified as illiterate. The figure for the number of adult illiterates in Finland in 1930 was thus 16 instead of 1 per cent. For earlier periods, this figure was much higher. It was 29 per cent for 1920, 45 per cent for 1910, and 61 per cent for 1900. The corresponding figure for 1880 was as high as 87 per cent. The contrast is glaring in comparison with Patterson's and von Schubert's observations of the Swedish and Finnish educational tradition.

But these contemporary UNESCO observers were also uncertain about the interpretation and use of the Finnish figures. An argument with the Finnish statisticians was described in a report published in 1957. Both sides were equally confused. The Finnish group tried to

include those who were only able to read with those who were able to write even if they had not been passed by the clerical examiners.³

Such an adjustment to the contemporary definition of literacy need not, however, necessarily be the only way of escaping the dilemma of the Finnish figures. The way out of this dilemma might instead be to accept the reading traditions on Sweden and Finland as historical reality and then adjust the concept of literacy accordingly to that. This alternative has been attempted in this chapter.

Theoretical starting-points: two patterns of analysis

Thus, to make a population literate requires some form of organized instruction or a number of literacy campaigns. This is true of all times and all countries. The ability to read and write became universal in the West only during the final years of the last century after the consolidation of compulsory schooling. The same result is aimed at in the developing countries today by means of large-scale literacy campaigns.

Such *purposeful educational measures* always follow a typical pattern. The breakthrough of literacy is characterized by great differences – education gaps – between the age groups. The younger ones are, to a larger extent, subject to teaching. The total literate growth is concurrent with the changeover of generations. The illiterate generations die away. The coming generations are made literate by means of education. The population will thus gradually become literate. This pattern is typical both of the past and of today and is the result of strong teaching measures. It is also, of course, part of this pattern that in the end there are no noticeable differences between occupational groups, sexes, town and country, and so on. All this is obvious. The observations indicated are, nevertheless, extremely useful for testing and defining various stages of literacy in a population.

This first pattern, however, gives place continually to another, which is characterized by prevailing differences amongst a population as regards *the demand and need for* literacy. These differences are principally defined by social and economic conditions. Differences primarily appear between various occupational groups. Some occupations are very dependent on active literacy. A literate environment is obtained in these occupations without any particular teaching campaign. The teaching requirements are supplied through private or limited social initiatives. Characteristic features appear here, too, with differences

remaining to the very last between occupational groups, sexes, or town and country. To trace and observe this pattern as well has proved to be profitable when analysing the development of literacy.

For want of better terms I usually call the two patterns of analysis *push* and *pull* patterns. The former is explained by means of systematic teaching measures irrespective of, for example, regional and social differences. The spontaneous learning motives are in the latter case explained by just such differences in environment as mentioned above.

Both patterns of analysis will be used below to consider the historical source material for Sweden and Finland.

The European background

Several factors helped to pave the way for a more widespread reading ability in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. Printing made it technically possible to produce books. The growth of nation states accentuated the need for books which would be available in the various national languages. But it was the Reformation which stimulated the popularization of reading. The individual was now expected to acquaint himself with the words of the Scriptures in his own native language.

These events are illustrated, for example, by the rapidly increasing number of translations and editions of the Bible. From the earliest history of the Church there had been versions of the Bible in about ten of the ancient civilized languages, among them Greek, Syrian, Coptic, Latin, and Gothic. In the late Middle Ages, attempts were made at translating the Bible into the western national languages. These translations were most often based on Latin. The art of printing and later the Reformation increased the importance of these translations. The Bible was printed in its entirety in German in 1466, in Italian in 1471, in French in 1487, in Dutch in 1526, in English in 1535, in Swedish in 1541, and in Danish in 1550. By this time the New Testament and other parts of the Bible had, as a rule, already been translated and printed. Luther's version of 1543 of the complete Bible from the original languages, Hebrew and Greek, appeared in no less than 253 editions during the lifetime of the translator.

To start with, the translations of the Bible were important principally for church services and sermons. It was not until the seventeenth century that the ability to read, which had been aimed at by the reformers, gained more ground among the masses. Thus, a clear difference rapidly appeared

between Protestant and non-Protestant Europe. Whereas in Catholic and orthodox Southern and Eastern Europe there were still very few people who could read – less than 20 per cent – there was a dramatic increase in Protestant Central and Northern Europe. An intermediate position was held by Northern Italy and parts of France with a certain literate tradition since the Middle Ages, at least in the commercial towns.

The ability to read was perhaps most widespread in Iceland with its unbroken literary heritage. But figures for England, Scotland, and the Netherlands also show that many people were able to read in these countries as well, perhaps more than 50 per cent. In Protestant Europe it can be estimated that about 35–45 per cent of the population could read at the turn of the eighteenth century.⁴ The reading campaign was now in full swing in Sweden and in Finland as well. This campaign was, as a matter of fact, carried out very thoroughly in these two countries, which will be shown in the following.

The world of the *Hustavla*

The full emergence of the Reformation

Trends in Sweden corresponded closely to those in Europe. Here, too, the Reformation had led to demands for popular education. More of the Scriptures were now supposed to be read and known in church and at home. Oral instruction could not, however, by itself fulfill the increasing requirements for knowledge during the seventeenth century. Reading from a book was now an indispensable skill for everybody. Sweden did not in this respect, differ very much from other Protestant countries.⁵

The ideas of the Reformation were, in reality, put into effect by the united efforts of the whole country. The work of national reconstruction was followed up during the seventeenth century by an extensive education of the people, which showed itself in various kinds of laws and regulations; for the dioceses this took the form of resolutions from clerical conferences and diocesan regulations, and for the whole country there were ecclesiastical and parliamentary resolutions. A number of proposals concerning Church law regulations for popular instruction were brought up. They ultimately led to the Church Law of 1686.

The Church Law contained rulings about general literacy. It said, for example, that children, farm-hands, and maid-servants should 'learn to read and see with their own eyes what God bids and commands in His Holy Word'. The expression was typical of the Reformation. Every

individual should 'with his own eyes' see and learn the meaning of the Bible. The object of this reading was to make the individual conscious of Christian faith and life, the latter being most important. Christian life would demonstrate faith in a social order combining every aspect of existence in what has been called 'the world of the *Hustavla*'.⁶

The world of the Hustavla

The collection of words from the Scriptures in the *Hustavla*** lay down the guiding principles for the whole society, for clergy and parishioners in the spiritual or teaching order, for the authorities and subjects in the political order, and for master and servants in the household or the economic order. Everybody was given duties and rights in a reciprocal system where everyone had to fulfill his obligations.⁷ Figure 1 (overleaf) is an attempt to illustrate the social outlook of the *Hustavla*. Everybody lived, according to the code of the *Hustavla*, in a three-dimensional system of social relations:

1. The king was sovereign in the political order, listener in the spiritual, order and head of the family in the economic order.
2. The clergyman was correspondingly subject, teacher, and head of the family.
3. The master was subject in the country, listener in the congregation and head of the family in his house.
4. The rest were, generally speaking, subjects, listeners, and household members.

The system was, thus, strongly patriarchal. The father figure recurred in the home, in the congregation, and in the national economy. The master with his family, the vicar with his parishioners, and the father of the people with his subjects made up the same pattern of joint responsibility and reciprocal obligations.

But this interplay also had its tensions. The ideological and political responsibilities did not coincide. The Church guarded its sole right to teach and instruct. The king was, in church, only a listener, however distinguished he might be. But it was exactly in his capacity as the most distinguished of the congregation that the king tried to assert the influence of the State over the Church. One sees this tension in the ideas of the Reformation with regard to the spiritual and the worldly

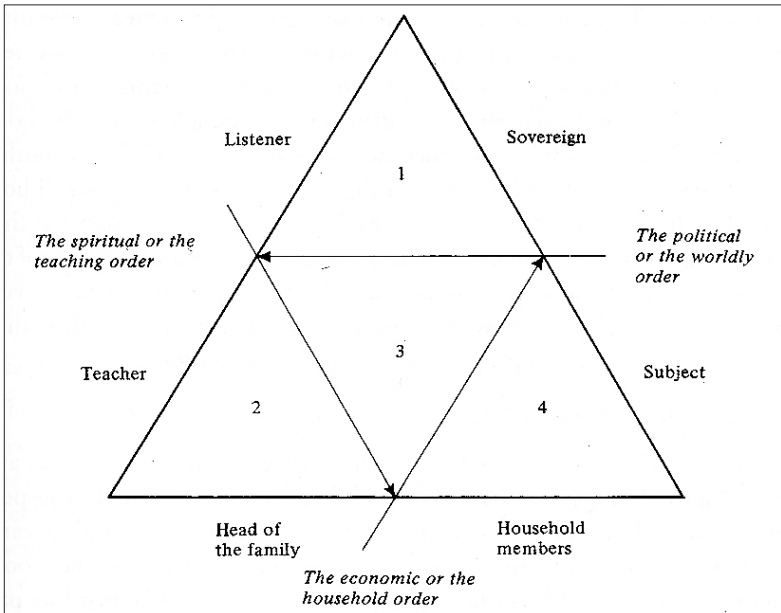


Figure 1. Outline of the threefold interplay of forces in 'the world of the "Hustavla"'.

domains. Both were of God. The worldly domain was God's indirect or 'improper' means of maintaining the social order with the help of laws and authorities. The spiritual domain was God's direct or 'proper' influence on the individual by means of his word so that a 'new individual would daily prove himself', in the words of the Catechism.⁸

The tension in the household order was abolished. The head of the family was both sovereign and priest in his house. He was the teacher and the up-bringer, influenced by the activities of the teaching order in the parish.

The spiritual or teaching order

The activities of the spiritual or teaching order were to a large extent determined by the lives of the Church and the parish. The bishops, assisted by consistory and rural deans, ruled the dioceses. Locally, the clergymen served as parish 'teachers' by means of their sermons, instruction, and examinations. This spiritual education was supplemented by the healing of souls and church discipline. It was the duty

of the parishioners as 'listeners' to become more and more acquainted with the message of the Church and put it into practice. The divine service was increasingly used as a means of education. Sermons on the Catechism, for example in dialogue form between parish clerk and clergyman, were one way of improving collective learning. Questions on the sermon with the parishioners sitting on their benches, or gathered in the sanctuary together with the other members of their district was another way of teaching and checking the learning process at the same time. Those who failed their examinations could be excluded from Communion and thus from the right to marry, since sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures was of fundamental importance for the household order as well. The duties of the clergymen were consequently extended to include calling on the parishioners in their homes and conducting yearly examinations.

The economic or household order

The economic or household order functioned within the villages and in the homes. The quotations from the Bible concerning the mutual dependence between husband and wife, parents and children, master and servants took up most of the space in the *Hustavla*. Except for the purely economic functions of work and everyday life, the household was also, just like parish life, characterized by sermons and instruction. Psalm-book and Bible texts were supposed to be used daily at family prayers. The older members of the family were supposed to give the children a programmed education, based on the Catechism. The clergyman was a teacher in the parish and the master was in a corresponding way supposed to be responsible for devotion, instruction, and examination in his house. He had also the authority to bring up children and servants with 'a reasonable amount of chastisement'. The congruence between the teaching and household order was striking. Home life was strongly influenced by congregation life on workdays and holidays alike.⁹

Church services and instruction went side by side in the village. This was at least true of Norrland with its vast woodlands, where the villagers gathered for prayers and reading on Sundays when they did not attend church. The meetings alternated from house to house as did most often the task of reading the texts and sermons. Detailed directions are given in a separate church ordinance for Norrland, dating from the beginning of the seventeenth century:

Likewise on Sundays or holy days in the Church year the clergy shall hold the daily lessons, together with Holy Scripture and Christian prayers and psalms, and also examine and instruct young persons. Residents of the outlying villages shall come to the homes of individuals who are already able to read and thereby hear the lessons and devotions which such persons are required to read aloud to them.

The ordinance also stated that 'all young boys, who might be thought capable of reading from a book, shall come to the church and there learn to read and sing'.

Such village reading is known from the early seventeenth century. It formed the basis of the so-called 'reading movement' which at times would be opposed to new books and new regulations within the Church. From this we get a documentation of the social environment in villages and homes which developed in the world of the *Hustavla*.

The political or worldly order

Political life in its popular form was shaped within village communities and parishes. Within the village there were the village council and the village assembly, meeting a couple of times every year to decide upon the common interests of the village, such as sowing and the harvest, the tending of cattle, fencing, the management of forest-land and mills owned in common, and so on. The village community came together at the annual village feast and at weddings and funerals where the villagers always turned out in full force. The yearly examinations and examination feasts fitted well into this tradition.¹⁰

An extremely old form of popular self-government was preserved at the parish meetings, where the parishioners, gathered under the guidance of their vicar, made decisions about common problems such as church building, poor relief, and popular instruction. The life of the individual was also taken up at the parish meetings, where there was a local administration of justice, something unique to Sweden. Trials could be held for such misdemeanours as Sabbath-breaking, swearing, or drunkenness. Particular care was taken to watch over public morals with, among other things, regulations concerning betrothals and marriages. Marriages had to be contracted publicly in church. New households had to be sanctioned by the parishioners.¹¹

Six or twelve representatives were chosen to carry out the resolutions of

the parish meeting and to watch over general order. They were, together with the local vicars and the church-wardens, the governors of the parish. They were supported by elected supervisors in the outlying villages.

The parish assembly most often also chose the vicar, even if he then had to be appointed by the bishop or the king. It also appointed electors for the general election of representatives from the peasantry to the Swedish Riksdag (Parliament). The electors gathered according to jurisdictional districts (in Dalarna within the country administrative division and in Norrland within the assize division) and appointed the representatives from the peasantry to the Riksdag for the parliamentary sessions every three years. The number of members from the peasantry was about 150 at every Riksdag during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There was a rapid turn-over of representatives. About one third were chosen for one parliamentary session, another third were chosen for two, and only 10–15 per cent were chosen for five parliamentary sessions or more. These figures apply to the latter part of the eighteenth century.¹²

Some 80 representatives for the burgesses were elected in the towns in a corresponding way by the magistrates and the burgesses. The ecclesiastical estate was made up of the bishops and of elected clerical representatives, 51 members in all. The nobles, on the other hand, had personal representation for their class. Upward of three hundred nobles could assemble for proceedings in the Riksdag.

Each of these classes or estates, however, cast only one vote when all the estates voted. The power of the peasantry to assert their position increased, and this has been partly explained by the fact that more and more of them were learning to read. This was the way power was divided between subjects and the authorities in the political order from the village community to the Riksdag in the world of the *Hustavla*. The increasing book-learning provided important inner strength for all the functions of society.

The reading campaign around 1700

The functional need for reading ability

People in the world of the *Hustavla* required deep ideological insight in order to be able to function properly. The liturgy and instructions concerning devotions and continued education in church and at home

were taken up principally in the Psalm-book.¹³ Ever since the first editions in the 1530s the Psalm-book contained, besides psalms, the Bible texts of the ecclesiastical year, the Catechism with Luther's explanations, the *Hustavla*, and prayers for home and church.

The Psalm-book of 1695 contained 413 psalms, some of them very long. The first 21 psalms were 'catechetical psalms', corresponding to the five articles of the Catechism. Then followed psalms 22–112 with biblical motifs from the Book of Psalms, and from the texts of the ecclesiastical year in psalms 113–215. The remaining half of the psalms were didactic psalms for everyday life, morning and evening psalms, and so on. One of the most noteworthy psalms was number 260, 'The Golden ABC'. Each of its 24 verses began in turn with the letters of the alphabet. Thereafter followed the texts of the ecclesiastical year, the Small Catechism, the *Hustavla*, the Athanasian Creed, David's seven Penitential Psalms, prayers for everyday use, and the regulations for baptism, marriage, and congregational services. The volume also included a long and penetrating discourse on how to interpret and obey Christian doctrine.

This Psalm-book appeared in at least 250 editions and in 1.5 million copies up to the introduction of the new Psalm-book in 1819. The parishioners were recommended to sing from the book in church. Its rhythm was marked by this. Long pauses between the verses were supposed to allow time for reading the next one. These pauses in church music were later to puzzle music theorists.¹⁴

Even more widespread than the Psalm-book were the special editions of the Catechism including the ABC-book, the text of the Catechism, Luther's explanation, and additional expositions with questions, answers and words from the Scriptures. A number of editions of this kind were circulated during the seventeenth century with an ever increasing content. Most widespread was the Catechism of 1689 with the expositions of Archbishop Svebilius. It included the text of the Catechism, Luther's explanation, Svebilius' expositions (including 303 questions and answers, and Scriptural passages), daily prayers, the *Hustavla*, the seven Penitential Psalms, additional questions for young people, bridal couples, and finally Arndt's rules for Bible-reading in the home.

Both the exposition in the Psalm-book mentioned above and the references in the Catechism to the Bible reader stressed the importance of active and engaged reading and its application to life. The Catechism

was regarded both as a book of devotion and as a compilation of Scriptural content. The Bible editions themselves were too expensive. It was not until the nineteenth century that the Bible became a common feature in the home.

The initiative from above

The Catechism and the Psalm-book became the most important works in the household during the seventeenth century. They manifested, together with the Church Law of 1686, the edicts, which applied to everyone, stipulating a fully developed Church education for the masses.

There were also, apart from the Church Law, other ordinances applicable to the whole country. A royal decree of 1723 constrained parents and guardians to 'diligently see to it that their children applied themselves to book reading and the study of the lessons in the Catechism'. Neglect could lead to payment of fines used for 'the instruction of poor children in the parish'. Such penalties give a good picture of the initiative from above on a central level. It was in the dioceses that theory became practice.¹⁵

The Conventicle Edict of 1726 had a similar significance. It was best-known for its prohibition of the pietistical conventicles with their devotional meetings outside the confines of the family household. Such spontaneous meetings were in themselves signs of increasing commitment to individual reading and devotion. But they were not to be included in the instruction in the teaching and household order. In the place of such conventicles, the edict recommended and stressed regular family prayers in the home, but only for the family household.

Popular instruction was also often prescribed at diocesan level, in diocesan decrees, and in resolutions passed by the clergymen's assemblies. Instruction was to be organized by the diocesan authorities. The local responsibility was placed on rural deans, vicars, and parish representatives. The initiative from above was completed by long and harsh examinations by the bishop and the rural dean at their visitations in the parishes. The recurrent instruction and examinations of the clergy enabled the Catechism to spread to the villages and homes.

Horizontal diffusion

The reading ability campaign in Sweden was carried through almost completely without the aid of proper schools. There were 'school masters' in the parishes, in the regions of Skåne and Gotland for example. The parish clerks and other assistants were also in some parts of the country made responsible for the instruction of the children. But the main responsibility lay with the parents in the home. This, too, was one of Luther's original ideas. The master was, in the household order, responsible for education in the same way as the clergyman was in the parish. The idea of the 'general priesthood' made the household order into something of a teaching order as well.¹⁶

A number of ABC-books with instructions for learning were published during the seventeenth century.¹⁷ Behind these instructions one finds the pedagogic ideas of Wolfgang Ratke and Amos Comenius. Ratke's *Didactica* was translated into Swedish in 1614. Comenius' first Swedish version of *Didactica Magna* appeared in 1641 and *Orbis Pictus* in 1683. Ratke and Comenius were both consulted about the educational problems in Sweden. The latter also visited Sweden twice in the 1640s.¹⁸

The reading instruction recommended in the ABC-books was the synthetic alphabetic method. The children were to learn the names of the letters first and then gradually learn to combine them into syllables and words. The following instruction at a visitation in the region of Norrbotten in 1720 provides a good illustration of this form of instruction.

The Rural Dean admonished the parish organist and others in the congregation involved in the instruction of young people to inculcate a firm knowledge of the lettered alphabet before proceeding with lessons in spelling. In like measure, they should not begin with basic reading before they have instructed the children in the correct and proper art of spelling. Furthermore, they should not impose any memorization exercises on the children before each is able to read directly from all books used in instruction. With respect to the first exercise in memorization, they should take heed that the children do not add or remove any letter of the written text but rather that they faultlessly follow each letter verbatim. Similarly, a child should not be allowed to recite the second lesson before the first is securely fastened in his memory. From the very beginning

the children shall have become accustomed to reading clearly and diligently and to making firm observance of each sentence to its very end. Furthermore, they shall have become fully aware of the text which they are reading and heed its utterance as if they heard it spoken by another. In this manner the children should gradually acquire a firm grasp of the textual meaning and content and be able to articulate such in words other than those given in the text. In like measure, they shall answer with their own words to the questions posed them in the text.

The instruction is typical. It corresponds well to leading ideas of the time. Learning should pass from what was concrete for the eye, via memory, to a complete understanding and application.

It was possible to spread reading ability and catechetical knowledge horizontally because of strong social pressure. It was important to make progress within households and village communities. Those who were already able to read were supposed to instruct those who could not. Successes and failures became known at the recurring examinations.

But it would be wrong to say that everything was a matter of compulsion in the Swedish reading campaign. Family prayers and village reading led many people to feel a need for religion. One sign of this was Pietism, that was just breaking through. Another were the 'readers' in Norrland. Insight into both the difficulties and successes of the campaign is obtained from the Church examination registers, forming part of the most noteworthy heritage from the time when Sweden was a major European power in the seventeenth century.

*The Church examination registers*¹⁹

Popular instruction as organized by the Church has been extremely well documented in Sweden and Finland. Progress in reading and Catechism knowledge was noted in special examination registers. The existence of these sources is in itself a strong verification of the above-mentioned campaign. It will be convenient to divide up the oldest examination registers on the basis of dioceses and deaneries as a first illustration, since popular instruction was enforced vertically from the dioceses, via the rural deans and the vicars, and thence out to the people.

The dioceses differ considerably from one another. The diocese of Västerås has the oldest examination registers. Some of them date back

as far as the 1620s. From this decade there are at least some examination registers still extant for every deanery in this diocese. In the surrounding dioceses, Karlstad, Strängnäs, Uppsala, Härnösand, and, in the south, Växjö and Visby, examination registers have been preserved for most of the deaneries since before 1720. The work in connection with the Church Law of 1686 is clearly reflected in the many registers from the 1680s. In the dioceses of Linköping, Kalmar, Skara, and Gothenburg there are examination registers dating from 1750 for the majority of the deaneries. The diocese of Lund is the exception, with a very early series of yearly so-called Catechism registers from the 1680s and a considerably later collection of actual examination registers. The latter are in reality so recent that the last 25 per cent of the deaneries only have examples from the nineteenth century. These sources consequently illustrate the date of the origin of the oldest preserved examination register for every deanery. This indicates the pace of the enforcement of popular instruction, where diocese and deanery make up hierarchic units. The difficult historical problem of judging to what extent the preserved source material is also the original one and the oldest is to some degree made easier because of these figures.

Some idea of the proportions of the historical problem with the archives can be gained by examining how the oldest preserved examination registers are distributed over the parishes (Figure 2). The order between the dioceses is the same. The majority of the parishes in the diocese of Västerås have examination registers dating back to before 1750. The other dioceses have examination registers from the latter part of the eighteenth century and the diocese of Lund from the beginning of the nineteenth century. As for the parishes, the diocese of Lund once again has Catechism registers which are well ordered and date back to the final decades of the seventeenth century. These registers were, however, used at only one examination. New ones were made up for every new examination. They have been preserved and there is a wide distribution over the parishes.

The Church examination registers were, on the other hand, used for many examinations, sometimes over many years. They were taken along on examination rounds which were often very long in the more extensive parishes of the country. They were subject to hard wear, damp, and fire damage, and ran the risk of getting lost in many different ways. It should also be noted that in the beginning the examination registers did not have the same status as the older Church records, such as the

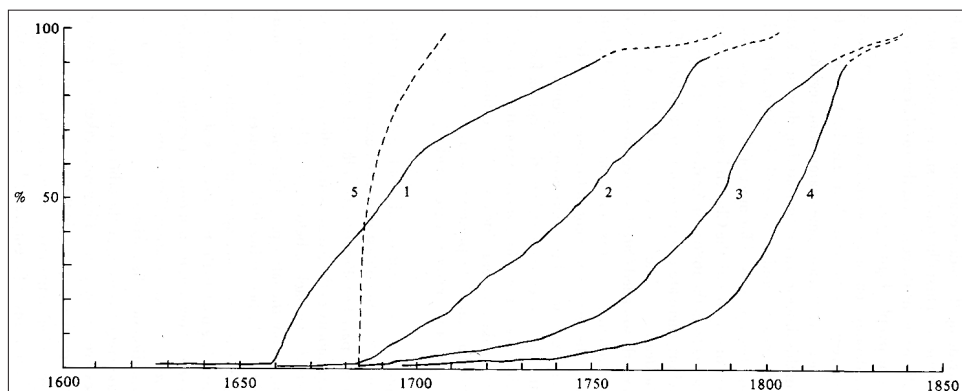


Figure 2. Percentage of parishes in various dioceses in which a Church examination register is known to have begun, at various points in time. (For diocese of Lund, a second line gives special catechism registers.) Urban areas are excluded ($N = 2,373$). *Source:* Churches archives. Division of deaneries and parishes according to the 1805 deanery tables.

registers for births, marriages, and deaths. It was not until the eighteenth century that their official importance increased as bases for census registration and as sources for the work of the Old National Central Bureau of Statistics after 1749.

It is still uncertain to what extent the original examination registers have actually been preserved. The existing surveys nevertheless confirm the activities of the clerical authorities for a more widespread popular education after the end of the seventeenth century. An examination register from Tuna in the county of Medelpad will be taken as a typical example of this.

An example: the reading campaign in Tuna in the 1690s

The Church Law of 1686 led to the setting up of organized examination registers in an increasing number of parishes. Tuna is one of them. Its oldest preserved examination register extends over the years 1686–91 (Figure 3).

The parish was at this time divided into six examination districts (rotes). The first pages are, unfortunately, missing in the register. The first district is, therefore, not complete and is omitted from the following analysis. A total of 397 persons over the age of 6 are noted in the other five districts. The youngest children are not noted until they

have been examined. This is already an illustration of the examining function of the register. The parishioners are arranged according to district, village, and household. The social position is stated for every individual within the household: husband, wife, son, daughter, maid-servant, farmhand, lodger, etc. Age, reading marks, and Catechism knowledge are, together with names, noted in special columns. The latter take up most of the space with ten columns for various types of knowledge: the words of the text, Luther's explanation of the five articles, prayers, the *Hustavla*, and specific questions. It is typical that these last three or four columns are never filled in this first register even if they are always drawn up. They indicate the increasing knowledge of the Catechism acquired because of an increase in reading ability. They bear witness in their own way to an intensified teaching campaign. Reading and Catechism knowledge are noted with judgements in plain language, for example 'intet' – *cannot* read, 'begynt' – has *begun* to read, 'lite' – can read *a little*, 'någorlunda' – can read *acceptably*, and 'kan' – *can* read. '*Cannot* read' and '*can* read' are presented separately in the following tables. 'Has *begun* to read' is the most frequent of the other marks. It was used principally for children and young people. As regards Catechism knowledge, this report only indicates the number of Catechism items that had been learnt.

A total of about three quarters of the population were given reading marks ('begun' or 'can'). Reading and Catechism knowledge are highly correlated. Most of those who got a high score in memorization also had high reading marks. The reverse is, on the other hand, not equally clear. The highest score in reading is not necessarily an indication of the highest degree of Catechism knowledge. This illustrates the previously mentioned order of learning. Reading was supposed to precede memorization.

This observation is even more obvious for those who have no marks. 19 persons have no reading marks and for 61 persons there are no notes for Catechism knowledge. Of these, 14 have no marks whatsoever. They have perhaps never been examined at all, since 5 of them are six-year-old children, whereas 4 of them are over sixty years of age. Only one of the two marks is missing for 52 persons, of whom 47 were examined in reading, but not in memorization. The reverse applies only to 5 persons. This is also a proof of the high priority given to reading instruction. The fact that several were given the mark '*cannot* read' does not contradict this. Quite the contrary. Reading from

a book was given most attention and emphasis at the examinations. This was the typical situation of teaching and examination just before the break-through of reading in a parish. It becomes clearer when the two marks are divided according to age. There were 12 people omitted since there is no information concerning their age.

All the dramatic events in a newly started reading campaign are evident from the records. It is clear that nearly half of the oldest could not read and one fifth of the middle generation could not read, whereas almost no one in the youngest group was illiterate. Most of the youngest are in the midst of the process of learning to read. On the other hand the time for learning has passed for the oldest ones. They either lack ('cannot read') or possess reading ability ('can read'). Their results may, nevertheless, give us an idea of the preliminary stages in the reading campaign. Knowing how little reading ability changes at a mature age, the oldest persons provide an indication of the number of people who were able to read a quarter of a century ago. That is, they represent reading ability in the 1660s, which at that time would

Village	The fourth district: Farmer, Wife, Children, Servants	Age	Can read from a book	<i>Simplic. Partes</i> Catech.	<i>Dialogus cum</i> <i>explicatione</i>	<i>Symbolum cum</i> <i>explicatione</i>	<i>Orat. Dom. Cum</i> <i>explicatione</i>	<i>Baptism cum</i> <i>explicatione</i>	<i>Sac. Caena cum</i> <i>explicatione</i>	<i>Confessions of sin</i>	Prayers	The "Hustavla"
Alstad	Jacob Eriksson	62	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can			
	(Wife) Ingeborg Eriksdotter	40	Cannot	Can	Accept	Badly						
	(Son) Erik Jacobsson	14	Begun	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can			
	(Daughter) Britta Jacobsdotter	16	Begun	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can			
	(Son) Jacob Jacobsson	10	Begun	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can			
	(Daughter) Karin Jacobsdotter	12	Begun	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can	Can			
	(Daughter) Anna Jacobsdotter	7	Begun									
	(Aunt?) Elin Eriksdotter	66	A little	Can	(died)							

Figure 3. The family of Jacob Eriksson in the parish of Tuna. The Family includes parents, five children, and an elderly lodger, probably an aunt. The columns indicate age, reading ability, knowledge of the words of the Catechism (*Simplic. partes*), and, on the other, knowledge of the five articles together with Luther's explanation (*cum explicatione*). Room is also left for confession, prayers, and the *Hustavla*. At a later examination (in the Church examination register for 1696–98), all children, except Anna, have been given higher grades in reading in that 'begun' has been altered to 'can' read. *Source*: Tuna, Medelpad, Church examination register, 1688–91, p. 12.

have been approximately 40 per cent and would thus have increased in the 1690s to over 70 per cent. The youngest children have not been included in the present analysis. Such a calculation also illustrates the dramatic change to a purposeful campaign for reading ability. The picture becomes even clearer when the material shows how the earlier Catechism memorization is outdistanced by reading.

It is conspicuous how evenly Catechism knowledge was distributed over the age groups, apart from the youngest who, so far, had not shown a very large amount of knowledge. For half of the youngest there is no note at all. The same is true of one quarter of the oldest. The impression is one of stagnation. This shows how far the old education standard had reached with mainly oral instruction and memorization. Only three people (1 per cent) have gone beyond the old standard of Luther's explanations. These three belong, typically enough, to the younger generation. More people are waiting to learn all the articles of the Catechism. Some of the ten columns drawn up in the examination register (Fig. 3), are waiting to be filled in. But this requires a more widespread and more widely used reading ability. This process has begun, as becomes quite clear when reading marks and Catechism knowledge are put together in age groups.

Here, too, the older and the younger differ a lot from one another. Among the oldest, both those who are able to read and those who are not able to read have marks in Catechism knowledge. If one examines the number of Catechism items one will, however, discover a difference in that those who are able to read among the oldest people also have a more extensive knowledge of the Catechism. For example, in the age group 41 years and older, 32 persons got the highest Catechism score, i.e. a note for six items. Three quarters of these 32 people are also able to read. Those having marks in both reading and Catechism in the age range 16–40 are as many as 77 per cent. In the second youngest age group they are as many as 94 per cent. The children, 6–11 years, finally, once more illustrate the progressive educational campaign. Nobody obtained marks in memorization first, whereas 31 per cent have, on the other hand, obtained marks in reading first. Five out of the eleven children in the 6–7 age group neither got marks for reading nor for the Catechism. The sequence of learning is here clearly illustrated. It passes from 'has begun' reading to catechetical knowledge; one cannot come to the latter without the former.

A typical feature of the patterns of analysis has, thus, been found

in the material for Tuna. The sudden advent of the reading campaign is seen in the educational gaps between the older and the younger generations. Another typical feature is that differences between the sexes, for example, become less obvious. The reading mark 'can' was obtained by 54 per cent of the men over 50 and by 33 per cent of the women. The corresponding percentage figures for the youngest, 20 years and younger, are 44 and 41 per cent respectively. A levelling-out is in progress. Women often have higher scores than men later on in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The increasing number of women who were able to read directs our thoughts to home instruction as it is depicted in literature and art, with either the mother or the father instructing the children in the home. To what extent did the children in Tuna have literate homes as early as the 1690s? A sample in the third and fourth examination district provides an answer to this question. Out of 16 families with children who were 16 years old and younger there is only one family where both the parents are illiterate. Both parents are able to read in ten families. It is hardly possible to discover any difference in the children's standard of reading, since this is more likely due to age, as has already been indicated. The newly started reading campaign is thus further confirmed. It was possible to fulfill the demands placed on all the younger people to learn and use the printed word provided that the required educational measures were taken.

Reading ability in Tuna was tested primarily with the aid of the first pattern of analysis, starting from purposeful educational measures. The development of reading is characterized by obvious differences in grades between the generations. It also appeared in its pedagogic aspect with, principally for the children, intensified learning to reach the stage preceding Catechism knowledge.

The second model of analysis with differences in environment, for example between families, has already been suggested. A knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, however easy it may be to acquire, does not spread spontaneously within a given environment. The generation gaps and the differences between the sexes among the older people also suggest this. Instruction and learning had to be provided, though not necessarily at great cost and in large quantities, but to a sufficient degree to make the basic skills of reading functional in an environment which was becoming more and more literate.

Systematic studies of the reading campaign

The Church examination registers provide an enormous field for research. The research has, however, in spite of many sporadic efforts, not obtained a firm grasp on these sources with regard to their contents and usefulness for the judgement of the distribution of reading ability. The development of methods has taken two directions. The first is an integrated system of information, keeping together the total amount of information in the Church archives of a certain parish over a long period of time. This method has been adopted and fulfilled in the interdisciplinary project, *Demografisk Databas* (Demographic Database).²⁰ The other method aims at structuring and organizing the varied notes on reading ability and Catechism knowledge in the examination registers.

The distribution of reading ability is seen as a centrally directed campaign. On the basis of this, certain hypotheses are made, in their turn leading to a defined methodology for the use of the sources. The contents of the examination register for Tuna were described in detail in the preceding section. It was, among other things, stressed that the age distribution of literacy is an important indicator of the pace of change. Change can, thus, best be seen through a comparison *between* the generations. All the youngest become literate. Many of the oldest remain illiterate. But as the older people die, there are a growing number of literate persons in a population. Earlier differences in reading ability between the sexes, between different social groups, between town and country, between various regions, etc., at the same time become less pronounced. The earlier characteristics of reading ability in the West thus disappear. This reading ability used to be very low and was largely preserved by the immediate economic and cultural needs of the community.

Two different patterns of analysis thus become evident. In the first, the age distribution is decisive for the analysis. The generation gaps will be the most expressive factor. The social gaps provide the explanations in the second pattern. It is, nevertheless, of vital importance to take both patterns of analysis into consideration in every examination. They always complement each other. They are, of course, equally valid for the studies of the educational explosions of the present.

These observations lead to the hypothesis that the reading marks in the examination registers in their initial stages are primarily to be correlated with the year of birth. This leads to a very simple methodology. The marks are distributed by birth cohort, irrespective of when the

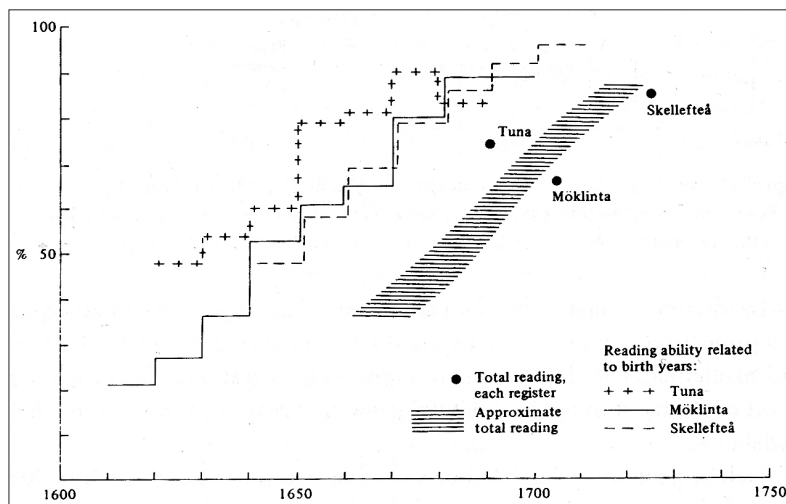


Figure 4. Reading ability in Tuna in 1691, in Möklinta in 1705, and in Skellefteå in 1724 according to the Church examination registers. In total (74, 66, and 85 per cent respectively) and related to date of birth. Percentage figures.

examinations were carried out. This means that the same 'generations' can be compared in different registers and between different parishes. The methodology will consequently also allow a certain amount of prediction of the past and the future on the basis of the time for a certain examination.

The methodology can be illustrated with the results from some preliminary studies. Comparing reading ability in Tuna, Möklinta, and Skellefteå in *c.* 1700 it is evident that the total number of people who could read in the three parishes was, according to the registers, somewhere between 66 and 85 per cent. The results, if distributed by decades of birth, show a great degree of similarity. Generation gaps can be discerned, with marked leaps in the process. A graph illustration (Figure 4) is even more explicit. The time axis indicates the measurements and the time of birth for the individuals. The curves represent a projection for every cohort back to its decade of birth. There is a great degree of similarity between the three parishes. The difference in time between the first and last measurement is still as great as thirty years. The advantage of this methodology is obvious. It will now be possible to make comparisons between various times and areas.

The methodology can be taken even further if there are results for

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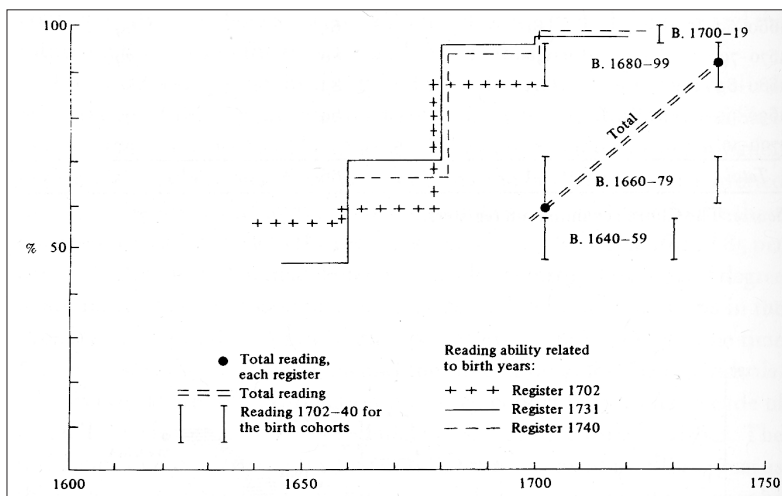


Figure 5. Reading ability in Skanör in 1702, in 1731, and in 1740 according to the Catechism register. In total (58, 81, and 92 per cent, respectively) and related to date of birth. Percentage figures.

several measurements in the same parish. Age, for example, is indicated in the Catechism registers for 1702, 1731, and 1740 for Skanör. The total number of persons able to read increases during this time from 58 to 92 per cent. The difference in 1702, with 67 per cent for the men and 49 per cent for the women, has been completely levelled out by 1740. The women have, by this time, even out-distanced the men to a certain degree, with 93 per cent of the women and 91 per cent of the men literate.

The result, however, becomes even more remarkable when reading ability in Skanör is projected back and forth in time on the basis of the different measurements. In Figure 5 the three results for 1702, 1731, and 1740 are related back in time to the respective periods of birth, and also between the measurement dates, to composite age groups common to all three. The total increase in reading ability is drawn as a line between the measurements. The slope of the line corresponds to the retrograde projection of reading ability distributed by birth cohort. Such a projection apparently anticipates fairly well the total reading ability some thirty years later. The simple conclusion is of course that the total reading ability of a population at a certain time is represented by the reading ability of the middle generation. This obvious rule of thumb is just as useful for the ample census material of later times for

reading ability. The intensity of the education of older people must of course also be observed, since it can affect the validity of the rule.

Another confirmation of the usefulness of the method is finally given in a projection of reading ability for the birth cohorts in Tuna, Möklinta, and Skellefteå. The shaded area in Figure 4 indicates such a projection. In other words, it indicates the total growth of reading ability in the three parishes.

Such projections of birth cohorts need not of course be used when there is a fairly long series of measurements for the same parish. This is, however, not often the case because of gaps in the material. The methodology described above is then a useful complement.

The reading campaign in Västerås and Visby

The hypotheses and methodology presented above have created opportunities for decisive research on the hitherto completely confusing material of the Church examination registers. The project has been awarded grants which have made it possible to plan and carry out a systematic study of a random sample of examination registers from parishes over the whole country. The parishes in every deanery have been arranged and numbered according to the deanery tables of 1805. One or two parishes for every deanery have then been selected with the aid of a table of random numbers. A division has been made into town and country parishes. Only the country parishes have been worked on so far; this is also where 90 per cent of the population lived up to the middle of the nineteenth century.

Because of the differences between the dioceses, the sample was processed diocese by diocese. The result for the diocese of Västerås will be our first example (Figure 6). The fifteen deaneries in the diocese are each represented by a parish chosen at random. The earliest register with both reading marks and information about age has been studied for every parish. There is, unfortunately, information about age in only six of the parishes before 1750, but after 1750 the number of measurements increase. In seven parishes the first useful registers have been checked against later registers. This means that a total of 23 examinations can be presented. The sources of error are, of course, numerous. There are, for example, some obscurities in a number of registers. That is why the doubling of some registers mentioned above has served as a check-up. Great pains have been taken to avoid the same people appearing several

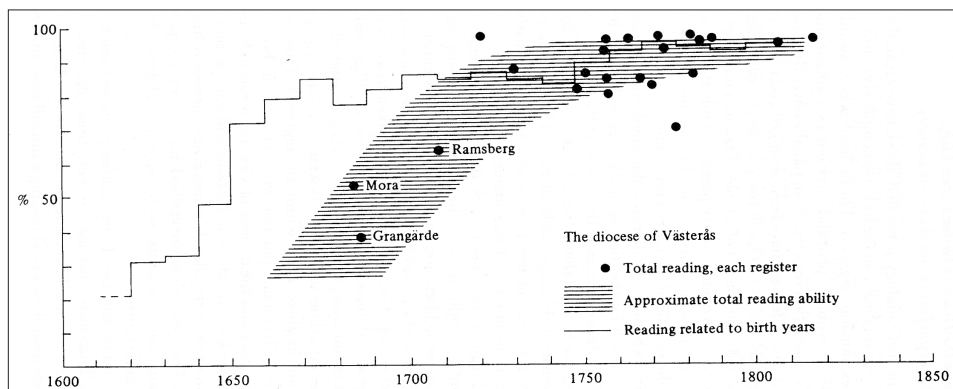


Figure 6. Reading ability in the diocese of Västerås according to the Church examination registers in a random sample of parishes. In total and related to time of birth. The population is about 15 years of age and older. Sample: 15 parishes, 23 church examination registers. Percentage figures ($N = 4,371$).

times in any one measurement. That is why, if possible, only the last examination in every register has been studied.

Since some parishes in the diocese of Västerås were very densely populated, a sample of people has been made within the registers. This, too, has been made at random. The total population will, of course, be included in any final report. The result for the diocese of Västerås seems to be unambiguous. Both the notes for separate examinations and a projection of the birth cohorts by two or three decades illustrate a very distinct reading campaign *c.* 1670–1720. The conclusions are verified in many ways, for example by the contemporary examination documents and by biographical data. They have also been borne out by the literature.²¹

There are also results for the diocese of Visby, although the examination registers studied for this diocese are much more recent – from 1750 onwards. The result is, nevertheless, comparable to the result for Västerås. All examination registers in the selection show a total reading ability of more than 80 per cent. A retrograde projection of birth cohorts also indicates a high degree of similarity with the diocese of Västerås. The conclusion is that the actual reading campaign took place before 1750 in Gotland as well, which can also be tested using registers from the beginning of the eighteenth century. These registers do not appear in the sample for the diocese of Visby.

These preliminary conclusions must now be tested and tried out

for other dioceses as well. But at least they demonstrate the suitability of the method by means of a sample for the whole country. The results must, of course, also be combined with other contemporary source material. They must also be compared to other relevant research results, for example in literature and in anthropology. The quality of the reading acquired as a result of the Swedish literacy programme must also be studied. Later, when the reading ability acquired in the initial campaign was to be consolidated and deepened in the population, the quality of reading came to be the subject of detailed markings in the examination records.

The spread of literacy in Sweden

The project has so far presented a general survey of the spread of literacy in Sweden. This can be visualized by means of a figure (Figure 7 overleaf). The shaded areas indicate hypotheses about literacy. The hypotheses concerning reading are primarily based on the Church examination registers. The hypotheses for writing are based on school statistics and on the information concerning literacy of convicts and army recruits, and the census of 1930. These sources also verify the big difference between reading and writing until well into the nineteenth century.

This difference is, in reality, very important. It must be regarded as an established fact that general reading was achieved without formal school attendance. Swedish home instruction was so successful that those who only received home instruction were, in reality, regarded as able to read in the official statistics. This cannot be explained without returning to the rigorously controlled reading campaign that started two centuries earlier.

The final stage of home instruction can easily be tested even today. Old people can tell you about parents and relatives who almost certainly could read printed letters but, on the other hand, could not write more than possibly their own names. These people had, as a rule, never attended school. Such 'illiterates' also exist in literature, for example Ida, the wife of Raskens in the novel by Vilhelm Moberg of the same name, or the father of Ivar Lo-Johansson, *Analfabeten* ('The Illiterate').

If this difference between reading and writing in Sweden is accepted, it will facilitate the use of the Swedish material when comparisons are made with other countries.

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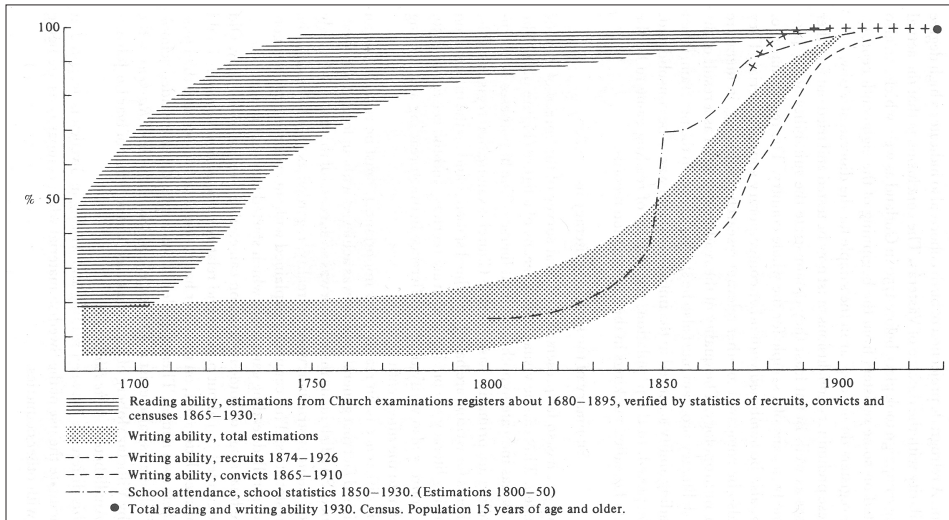


Figure 7. Reading and writing traditions in Sweden, about 1680–1930. Preliminary results of current research. Population of about 10–15 years of age and older. Schoolchildren about 6–15 years of age. Percentage figures.

Some conclusions

The history of Swedish literacy provides some experiences that can also be applied to the problems of the current literacy debate.

The two patterns of analysis have been quite useful. The first evaluates strictly controlled mass campaigns with a political or an ideological background designed at a rapid pace and increase to bring about widespread literacy. According to the second pattern of analysis permanent differences are observed between sexes, occupational groups, town and country, etc., which reveal that economic needs are what primarily direct the events.

But this also contradicts the modern opinion that literacy is primarily (and solely) part of the so-called modernization process, where industrialization, urbanization, political participation, etc., make up the inevitable framework. To accept an early reading tradition in a pre-industrial, agrarian, developing country like Sweden is an important contribution towards dissolving some of the most difficult problems in this formula for Western modernization.

This formula also states that reading and writing always follow each other closely. The acceptance of the Swedish and Finnish material will release the literacy debate from one of its most difficult positions. A modified literacy concept must then be taken seriously with revaluations of functioning semi-literate environments.

This early reading tradition in Sweden also strongly emphasizes the importance of engaging the whole population in the literacy process. An informal learning process where everyone helps everyone else is cheap and provides effective co-operation between home and school, where the home and the family provide the primary educational context.

The Swedish material also stresses the importance of the political will for the literacy campaign. This was also strongly emphasized, for example, in the Declaration of the Persepolis Literacy Conference in 1975.

Warnings were also issued in Persepolis against the so-called post-literate problem in the West. The gravity of these warnings has made itself felt in Sweden, too. A modern society does not spontaneously maintain literacy at the highest level. New directions for emphasizing the basic skills of reading and writing must be issued in the schools.

Finally the Swedish tradition illustrates the fact that the ability to read must not be an end in itself. 'To read the word or to read the world' was a striking theme in Persepolis. Everything was, in the Swedish tradition, concentrated on comprehending, understanding, and putting the word into practice in everyday life. Reading was not to be an end in itself; it was instead a question of experiencing the total environment of life and society. 'To read the world of the Word' could be the surviving message of the old Swedish reading tradition.²²

Notes

* Reprinted from Egil Johansson, 'The History of Literacy in Sweden, in comparison with some other countries', *Educational Reports, Umeå*, No. 12, 1977 (Umeå, Sweden: Umeå University and School of Education, 1977), 2–42, by permission of the author.

** The *Hustavla*, (a religious plaque which was hung on the wall), was a supplement to Luther's *Small Catechism*. It consisted of specific Bible verses arranged according to the traditional, Lutheran doctrine of a three-stage, social hierarchy – *ecclesia* (church), *politia* (state), and *oeconomia* (home or household). These selections of Scripture outlined the Christian duties and obligations which each stage in this hierarchy owed to the others – i.e. priests/parishioners (teachers/pupils), rulers/subjects, heads of families (parents)/children and household servants.