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Indigenous Assimilation and Progressive Mirages: The Globalization of American Narratives of Educational Reform

Madhu Narayanan
Portland State University, madhun@pdx.edu

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Madhu Narayanan
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy,
Portland State University, Portland, USA
madhu.n@pdx.edu

In a darkened room in Montevideo, Uruguay, a packed room of people in business wear gathered for the formal launch of the 2023 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report UNESCO, 2023). This year's theme was technology in education, including its incredible potential and the frightening dangers. "No screen will ever replace a teacher," the Director-General, Audrey Azoulay declared in a pre-recorded video. A parade of dignitaries, ministers, and officials marched across the wide stage bathed in baby blue light, delivering speeches, sitting on panels, and showing videos, all as the audience celebrated.

Almost 100 years earlier, the Institute for Government Research released the Meriam Report in 1928, a massive study of Indigenous people in the United States. Unflinchingly rational, the report criticized federal policy, but it also set a high-minded vision for progress. Celebrated in the press and hailed by historians in the following decades (Bertolet, 2007; Szasz, 1999; Philp, 1977; Downes, 1945), the report became perceived as a turning point in the education of Indigenous children and signaled a renewed faith in government.

These two reports bookend almost a century of worldwide expansion in the institution of schooling. In this paper I examine how a singular type of artifact, official reports calling for educational reform, are symbolic messengers carrying the unique colonial message of progress and assimilation through education. The Meriam Report was notable for bringing a technical and

rational bureaucratic administration to the education of Indigenous[17] children. The Global Monitoring Report (GEM) continues that same spirit of stimulating progress for children on the margins of education, this time on a global scale.

Seeing the two reports together against the backdrop of an increasingly homogeneous world culture of schooling shows how a settler colonial idea of assimilation through education has been globalized. We live in a world with a near-uniform grammar of schooling, a flattened educational landscape where millions of students learn the same topics in the same way with the same tools. This educational uniformity first found success in its imposition on Indigenous populations around the world and has since reinforced a fundamental dynamic of the colonial project (Swartz, 2019; Silova & Brehm, 2015), pioneered in the United States where the government promised to make Indigenous culture almost, but never quite fully, the same as dominant society (Bhabha, 2012; Deloria, 2004). This is an analysis of education policy as written by dominant elites; though the subject of these efforts are Indigenous communities and marginalized populations of largely developing countries, their voices are largely absent. Still, Indigenous scholars have laid the ideological bedrock challenging the legitimacy of official narratives, largely by describing the discursive backgrounds that create fields within which it is possible to construct education as a project of reforming the Other (Bird, 2018; Brown, 2017; Deloria, 2004; Seth, 2007).

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[17] I use the word "Indigenous" in reference to Indigenous populations of the present-day United States. This is an imperfect term, and there are many other labels to be used, each with their own advantages and shortcomings. I reproduce "Indian" when quoting sources or titles (Smithsonian Institution, 2023).

Such reports are not the purveyors of outright lies or blatant distortions of the truth, but they construct a narrative that is no less misleading. This resonant message of education as a powerful vehicle of progress cloaks the assimilationist impact of schooling, a dynamic echoing colonial projects of domination. My argument is grounded in a discourse analysis perspective that attends to the production, consumption, and use of language, which I'll describe in the following section. I'll next analyze the context and content of the Meriam Report, then turn to the 2023 GEM Report, a glossier product created by a different institution no longer tied to a single national power yet employing a similar discourse of assimilation. I'll close by comparing the two reports and showing how they are discursive creations; more than the text of the report alone, they are symbols that institutions craft to legitimize their existence and uphold a certain order through educational narratives.

A Discourse Analysis Perspective

I write from a perspective of discourse analysis that views language as dialectically related to social conditions (Fairclough, 2013a). That is, language is a product of the relationships and material conditions of society, reflecting differential positions in social hierarchies or degrees of power. But language can also be productive, actively creating subjectivities, social relationships, and perceptions of reality (Gee, 2014). Language, depending on how it is employed and interpreted, can influence our understanding of the world.

Discourse is more than language. The impact of written or spoken language extends beyond the actual words used, influenced by a collection of textual and extratextual factors that can all be considered discourse. Fairclough (2013a) describes discourse as a fluid process of social interaction of which text is but one element. One also must consider the conditions under which a text is produced and interpreted. The words and grammar of language are clearly important, but so too are the non-verbal elements, visual symbols, and surrounding context that shape how a text is interpreted. An elegant and heartfelt poem carries different meanings if read aloud at a ceremony or plastered on a street wall. The entire process from production to text to consumption comprises a set of discursive practices, though discourse can also refer to a singular instance of practices - for example discourses of accountability, religion, consumerism, or as I hope to show in this paper, assimilation and progress.

Discourses can also be considered linguistic manifestations of underlying ideologies (Purvis & Hunt, 1993). Identifying and describing the ideological underpinnings of discourse is what lends discourse analysis a critical bent (Rogers, 2004). Ideologies are systems of thought that lead to certain conventions and relationships being considered "common sense" or normal. It is related to power because in the absence of physical coercion, ideological systems can foster consent. Language plays a fundamental role in reproducing ideologies because it "presents the existing social relations as both natural and inevitable" (Purvis & Hunt, 1993, p. 478).

I'm making the contention that ideologies of progress and assimilation are prevalent in official educational reports. I use the Meriam Report and the 2023 GEM Report to illustrate how the origins of these discourses can be found in settler colonial educational efforts that have expanded globally. These are not divisive appeals that employ abrasive statements, inflammatory language, or brazen lies; but their formal tone and rational discourse nevertheless warrant critical attention.

The Meriam Report

The Meriam Report was published in 1928 and was a massive document, 857 pages of detailed findings, statistics, and policy recommendations. The very first page describes the Institute of Government Research (IGR), the agency contracted by the US Department of Interior to write the report, and goes on to list its officers

and trustees. The report opens with a gracious letter of introduction from Institute Director W.F. Willoughby, clearly marking the solution-oriented objective of the report:

> *The object of the Institute was not to say whether the Indian Service has done well with the funds at its disposal but rather to look to the future and insofar as possible to indicate what remains to be done to adjust the Indians to the prevailing civilization.* (p. vii)

This letter sets the tone for the report. Throughout the 1920s there was rising national concern about the treatment of Indigenous people. Conservatives had been influential for years in arguing that the government should cease all federal support, abolish reservations, and let Natives fend for themselves. They had already been successful in annexing millions of acres of Native American land and letting native schools wither away from poor funding, staffing, and neglect (Adams, 2020; Fear-Segal, 2007; De Jong, 2007; Philp, 1977). But momentum was increasing for reform, and the report was meant to generate evidence-based recommendations on how to improve the condition of the country's Indigenous peoples.

With sections devoted to economics, family life, and health, the report had many tangible impacts. In the following years, budgets were increased, a path (albeit a restricted one) was created for self-determination, and the practice of removing children from their families to attend distant federal boarding schools was severely curtailed (see Adams, 2020; Bertolet, 2007, Philp, 1977). Yet the fundamentally assimilative nature of these reforms is evident in this short quote from Willoughby's letter. A reminder of the superiority of White society is signaled by the use of the phrase "prevailing civilization," while Indigenous culture is clearly marked as substandard when positioned as an object in need of adjustment.

"The whole Indian problem is essentially an educational one," (Meriam, 1928, p. 348) the report states in the section on education,

discursively elevating education as the key vehicle for such adjustment. It is in the discourse of education that ideologies of progress and assimilation can be clearly seen. The education section repeatedly calls for better teacher training, more stringent teacher qualifications, and clear learning standards. It forcefully recommends larger budgets and modern bureaucratic structures of management, all themes familiar to today's students of educational policy. These are the calls of a nascent educational institution expressing faith in its ability to lead change.

First, the report had to settle the question of the basic humanity of Indigenous people. In a section titled "Can the Indian be 'educated'?" it takes on common racist notions that Indigenous children were mentally deficient:

> *Whether certain Indian characteristics of today are racial or merely the natural result of experiences…it is the task of education to help the Indian, not by assuming that he is fundamentally different, but that he is a human being very much like the rest of us, with a cultural background quite worthwhile for its own sake and as a basis for changes needed in adjusting to modern life* (p. 354).

The existence of a class of "Indian characteristics" is identified as discretely different but at the same time "very much like the rest of us." It also upholds the white expertise as responsible to "help the Indian." And, as Indigenous communities are those who will be "adjusting to modern life," the superiority of white civilization is again reinforced. This passage shows a particularly colonial dynamic of demonstrating benevolence without extending full humanity to Indigenous others who are "a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 2012, pp. 122-126).

The report then takes on a variety of pressing educational issues causing deficiencies in learning, from poorly trained teachers to facilities in disrepair. One part details the need for using modern salary schedules, and another discusses

the importance of vocational curricula. In addressing these topics, the report employs a particular discursive structure. Here is one example from a passage concerning pedagogy:

> *The impression a visitor almost inevitably gets upon entering the classroom of an Indian school is that here is a survival of methods and schoolroom organization belonging …to a former period. The nailed-down desks, in rows; the old-type "recitation"; the unnatural formality between teacher and pupil, the use of mechanistic words and devices, as "class rise!," "class pass!"; the lack of enriching materials, such as reading books and out-of-doors material, all suggest a type of school-keeping that still exists, of course, but has been greatly modified in most modern school systems, if not abandoned altogether, as the result of what has been made known in the past twenty-five years about learning and behavior* (pp. 378-379).

The structure of this paragraph is one frequently used: an improper practice is first highlighted, then contrasted with modern standards. Here, obsolete teaching methods and materials "belonging…to a former period" are shown as lagging behind "most modern school systems." Native American education is depicted as a system of deficits that has not caught up with "what has been made known…about learning." The word 'modern' is used 52 times in the education section alone, a linguistic symbol of the new knowledge of human learning generated through science. The metaphor of progress is fully evoked where reservation schools are lagging behind the ascendant mainstream schools in their organization, supplies, and administration.

Through the one hundred pages of the education section, the Meriam Report repeats this structure. A problem is identified and contested with modern principles that point to a logical solution (Narayanan, 2023). The solution to the deficient education of Indigenous people is constructed as an identifiable and knowable problem, one that can be solved by bringing them into mainstream society. An American bureaucratic model of education was taking hold in the 1920s with increasingly standardized principles of modern management (Tyack, 1974). To be included in this move towards progress, Indigenous education had to follow the same scripts as those defining the mainstream bureaucratic educational structure (Bird, 2018; Brown, 2017). As the decades passed, this model was also replicated and exported worldwide (Meyer, 2009; Boli et al., 1985); though its origins aren't American alone, the idea of supporting flawed communities in meeting accepted standards would become globalized, a trend well exemplified in the GEM Report.

The 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report

The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report is an entirely distinct experience than the Meriam Report, reflecting a century of evolution in the communication of official agencies. It employs new ways of sharing information, key points, and messages with the public, but also reflects how official messaging is consumed in the present era. In many ways, it is a different type of document: visually striking, colorful and full or eye-catching graphics, all tied together with harmoniously coherent fonts and headings. High-resolution pictures are placed alongside helpful text boxes and well-crafted data tables. Still, it remains a document that can be analyzed discursively, a product that reflects its unique system of production.

The cover shows a picture of a school age girl sitting at a common school desk, her chair connected to the table. Her head is in her hands and she is staring down at a bright tablet, a video poised to play. Behind her are two other boys at desks, similarly absorbed in their tablets. The title of the report is below: "Technology in education – A tool on whose terms?" Every chapter leads with a similar picture, usually a child centered in the frame with a dingy classroom in the background juxtaposed against some technological apparatus. One picture has a

girl in a robotics lab (UNESCO, 2023, p. 177), another is of a boy completing a workbook next to a transistor radio (p. 120), and yet another is of a teacher poised in front of a smartboard (pp. 107-108). The key points are clearly summarized at the beginning of each chapter in bold, neatly accompanied by sub-text in a lighter font.

A range of funders are listed alongside their logos, from national development agencies to private foundations (p. xii). There is IrishAid, the government of Monaco, and the Gates Foundation. The European Union is listed beside the Malala fund. The message is clear that this is an intergovernmental effort, a global community coming together in collaboration even as the funding represents a narrow swath of state and non-state actors.

There is also a list of all the previous reports published by UNESCO under the "Education for All" initiative, with titles such as *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?*, *Is the world on track?*, and *Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments* (p. xii). These titles underscore the unifying purpose of the reports - that there is a set course for global educational progress, there are benchmarks along the way, and UNESCO has an important role in keeping those commitments.

The first section of the report is focused on the theme of technology. There is a clear and easy to follow summary followed by detailed chapters on topics such as governance, equity and inclusion, and digital skills. Each chapter is stocked with references, accompanied by helpful graphics. For example, a chapter on teaching and learning makes clear that little is known about the benefits of technology in learning: "Good, impartial evidence on the impact of education technology is in short supply" (p. 3). Private companies are called out for promoting much of the positive literature on the use of technology (p. 58). It makes the point that technology use needn't be fancy, and strong learning can accompany low tech tools. It then celebrates the innovations of private companies like Mindspark in India, Geekie in Brazil, ALEKS in US, and Google translate, before highlighting the

potential of games, videos, and remote coaching (pp. 60-81).

Governance is the topic of another chapter. Few governments have the necessary administrative infrastructure devoted to supporting and monitoring technology use, the chapter claims, and private companies are allowed to have control over public data (pp. 60-81). It describes a global absence of laws around cyberbullying, digital privacy, or mobile device use, for example writing:

> *Despite the urgent need for it, national legislation has barely addressed data privacy and security in using technology in education…only 16% of countries guarantee data privacy in education with a law and 29% with a policy (the countries are mainly in Europe and Northern America).* (p. 149).

One chapter writes about the need for digital skills, where "more than half of countries do not have standards for digital skills" (p. 89). Media and data literacy are deemed to be insufficiently addressed in secondary education, particularly in developing countries. The rural-urban gap is highlighted, as is the lower digital literacy of children of parents who haven't completed high school.

Part one is thoughtful, nuanced, and written with care. It engages seriously with the questions and challenges of technology, helpfully describing important digital tradeoffs like those between personalization and social needs or commercial and public interests (pp. 23-24). But the section also carries a clear message that technology is here to stay, that private companies will continue to play an increasing role in education, and that strong governance is required. The report forcefully promotes the inclusion of digital literacy as a basic subject in school, hinting at the process of how the world settles on a common curricula and common laws of governance.

Part two refocuses on the central mission of the report, as reflected in the title "Monitoring education in the Sustainable Development Goals." This purpose is explained further:

…the GEM Report is providing a global update on progress towards the targets of universal access to education, the provision of key minimum inputs and the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (p. 201).

This is stated with the nonthreatening phrase "global update," then underscored with the technical language of "key minimum inputs" and "relevant learning outcomes." Casting aside the complex and interesting theme of technology in education, the purpose is clear: to monitor global progress on established metrics. There are chapters on primary education, early childhood programs, equity, citizenship, facilities, and teachers. Well-designed graphics continue, except now they are focused on evaluating countries; for example, one evaluates a collection of countries based on how much physical playtime is given to students (p. 135).

But the most interesting part of the report is also the least text heavy: over ninety pages of statistical tables fill out the end of the document. This section is a compilation of a wide variety of measures compiled from countries. Educational data is tracked and reported in idiosyncratic ways around the globe, but the report standardizes this diversity and presents them in coherent well-organized tables. "Education data reported to the UIS are in conformity with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)" (p. 344), the report notes in the introduction to this section, followed by a series of footnotes, caveats, and qualifications. "UIS" represents the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, a separate unit of UNESCO whose main mission is the collection and compilation of data for reports like this.

Seven tables track progress on the different targets of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal concerning education. Table 1, wide like a centerfold and stretching across several pages, reported on "Education system characteristics and education expenditure." Table 3 presents a host of early childhood indicators of well-being such as "moderate or stunting rate", living with 3 or less books, developmentally on track in health,

learning and psychosocial well-being. Table 7 concerns characteristics of classroom teachers, including rates of training, qualifications, and attrition.

The chapter themes, the report's organization, the pages of tables, the clean presentation and eye-catching visuality, all signal competence, authority, and above all rationality. Throughout the language of standards and global community create a vision of a deeply interconnected world society committed to common goals, dancing around the complicated questions of national sovereignty and accountability. Rather than using force or political coercion to motivate collective action, the report makes a technical and rational appeal to nations by hinting who is "on track" or "meeting goals." "The GEM report is more than just a report" (p. 206), the document states, claiming instead to be about monitoring, resources, country specific feedback, and shared legal structures. Of course it is; the report is a symbol of progress grounded in standardization and measurement.

Progressive Myths & Assimilationist Narratives

On the surface, the GEM Report and the Meriam Report are two very different documents, divided by time, purpose, scale, and geographic focus. It is reasonable to question the overlap between a document about Indigenous education and one written a century later concerning the global monitoring of education efforts. In this section, I underscore how two distinct reports share common narratives of assimilation through education that are effectively cloaked in myths of progress and rationality. Benevolent mirages of education have discursive roots in the settler colonial project of the United States that have since carried over into a world educational culture that is increasingly homogenized and standardized.

Discourse analysis offers a perspective that can uncover such narratives by looking beyond the text to the discursive practices involved. This

involves analyzing how such documents are produced, the way language is used, and the processes and relationships that bring them into being. We must take such documents seriously because they are official artifacts. They don't traffic in lies or broad efforts at deception; they are instead masked in rationality and buried in the social conventions that craft stories from a shared collection of meanings. Discursive practices cloak the contingency of certain perspectives, thus normalizing the dynamics of power that lead to a given collection of ideas being taken for granted (Purvis & Hunt, 1993; Mumby, 2004).

First consider the similarities between the reports. Both reports share a comparable production. The Meriam Report was initiated when the US Secretary of Interior contracted the Institute for Government Research - later to become the Brookings Institute - to conduct a detailed funded survey carried out in "a thoroughly impartial and scientific spirit" (Bertolet, 2007, p. 117). Lewis Meriam, a former US Census statistician, was selected as the leader, and he insisted on hiring the most qualified experts. Several pages of the report are devoted to the credentials of his team. Carson Ryan, for example, was the author of the education section and had his bona fides listed in a dense block of text; he was a professor at Swarthmore, graduate of Harvard and Columbia, a veteran of many previous educational surveys, and had already held several advisory and editorial positions (Meriam, 1928, p. 84). For nine months beginning in October 1926, Meriam and his team traveled the Western United States conducting fieldwork on various reservations. Beginning in Norman, Oklahoma, they visited thirty different sites before ending the following May at the Rosebud agency in South Dakota. In the summer, the team drafted their reports, with Meriam editing their work in the Fall before publication in early 1928 (Parnam & Meriam, 1982).

The GEM Report also took approximately two years. It also involved a collection of experts, though this team was much larger. It drew on an advisory board, a team of background researchers, and various institutions of higher education that contributed researchers and reviewers. There was also a lengthy consultation process where others could provide comments and suggest revisions (UNESCO, 2023). Though the scale of participants is larger, the report is an immense collaborative product of a collection of experts gathered a wide range of evidence - in this case through UNESCO Institute of Statistics and additional background research - to be compiled in the report.

Another similarity is structural; both reports open with formal letters of introduction from agency leaders. The Meriam report includes a highly formal "Letter of Transmittal" from the director of the IGR, while the GEM Report opens with a Foreword from the Secretary General of UNESCO and a second forward from Dr. David Moinina Sengeh, the chair of the GEM Report Advisory Board. "I am therefore pleased to see the collaboration with partners…whose daily work is about the importance of evidence for decision-making" (p. ix) writes Dr. Sengeh, setting a tone of proactive evidence-based thinking. The Meriam Report similar opens with Dr. Willoughby writing "The object of the survey has not been to take sides for or against the Indian Office, but to endeavor through constructive criticism to aid insofar as possible in pointing the way toward marked improvement" (Meriam, 1928, p. ix).

Both reports speak the language of statistics to make their case. The Meriam is peppered with data tables that tabulate everything from per capita value of Indian property, tribal income, nurses per bed capacity, and the number of people living in a room together. The education section details the incomes of staff, school age child population data, and per pupil expenditures. In the GEMS report, page after page of neatly arranged columns constrain a matrix-like spread of numbers, all in a small font and listed under headings that stretch from margin to margin. Country names scroll down the left side of the page, organized by region, like

a museum collection of the world's schooling operation. These statistical tables are the center of gravity of the report, the concealed bulk that lends weight to its findings. Like the hidden back-office operations of a firm or powerful engine tucked under a hood, these numbers drive the report forward. Both reports, then, rely on numbers to essentialize the complicated work of education into a field of entities that can be easily compared and ranked, transforming statistics into symbols of a need for progress (Pettersson et al., 2016).

They also use the language of progress. As I showed above, the discursive structure of the Meriam report repeatedly followed a pattern of identifying a problem, contrasting it with modern principles, and presenting a logical solution to move on the path of progress towards modernity. In the GEMs report, progress is quite literally encoded into the Sustainable Development Goals. The very purpose of the report is to monitor improvements towards a collection of ends defined as progress by a global community of experts.

Most relevant for this paper, both papers use the language of assimilation. The Meriam Report is written around a discourse of bringing Native schools in line with modern standards of education. Every recommendation for improvement is really a call for Native children to be made into American citizens through the administrative machinery of American schooling. Likewise, whether the GEMs Report is cataloging qualified teachers, the presence of curriculum standards, or types of subjects taught, it is arguing that such practices are the way all nations should design policy. The Meriam Report advocated vocational training; the GEMs Report did the same with digital literacy. Both are furthering a particular vision of education normalized as the best and most appropriate for all.

Of course there are countless differences. These are two reports created in different times and with different mandates: one is an evaluation of an agency and its treatment of Indigenous people; the other is designed to monitor progress across diverse nations. Furthermore, the scope and scale are different; one is targeted at a specific nation-state, while the other seeks to influence an international community. But their discursive context and production share enough similarities to see that these documents put language into action to speak to the same type of audience: administrators and decision makers who are in a position to rationalize their efforts to lead assimilative institutional change.

Conclusion

It may seem unusual to have chosen these two particular reports out of the many that are released each year. Indeed, official policy reports from agencies, think tanks, governments, and other institutions have created their own voluminous type of discourse (Fairclough, 2013b; Taylor, 1997). There have been many such "official reports" on the state of Indigenous education (e.g., Newland, 2022; Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969; Jackson, 1965), education in the United States in general (e.g., National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2023; Irwin et al, 2022; Gardner, 1983) and by intergovernmental organizations (e.g., UNESCO, 2022, World Bank, 2011). I have chosen to analyze and compare these two reports because they highlight a clear throughline of assimilative narratives from a settler colonial bureaucracy to their colonial echoes in current global education policy (Mundy & Manion, 2021). The Meriam Report was written at a time when an administrative machinery was consolidating around a standard model of education, while the GEM Report represents the latest in a multi-decade effort to achieve baseline global educational goals. In this conclusion, I describe one last similarity between the reports to illustrate the nature of their narratives, and their common context of responding to perceived educational crises with a drive for assimilation.

Perhaps where the two reports are most similar is in their shared genesis. The Meriam Report was written during a period of brutal

boarding schools, battles over compulsory schooling, and the expansion of mass public education (Adams, 2020). The outwardly racist ideologies that supported widespread neglect were losing ground to compassionate pleas for assimilation and to make Indigenous people suitable for existence in white civilization (Hoxie, 2001). The US government was assailed by humanitarians, civil society, and journalists to address the institutionalized corruption, theft, and violence that had defined the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Under pressure, the Secretary of the Interior sought to appease reformers by appointing a series of committees to study the issue, but the conservative forces hardwired into the federal government could only muster toothless plans with little commitment or desire for change (Prucha, 1995). Facing open revolt after years of unrelenting press coverage, the Interior Department commissioned an impartial outside agency to conduct a detailed and thorough study. This series of events led historian Donald Critchlow (1981) to write that the Meriam Report was less an act of goodwill or a symbol of progress but rather "defensive response of a government bureaucracy under attack from its own constituents" (p. 324).

The latest GEM report is also being published at a time of organizational crisis, in this case the declining relevance of intergovernmental agencies in leading educational change (Burnett, 2019; Heyneman, 2009). UNESCO in particular has been criticized for its poor leadership around the Sustainable Development Goal of education, obscure priorities, and inability to raise funds. The United States, for example, is a notably absent financial supporter and even discussing aid for UNESCO is politically impossible. Meanwhile, private actors and funders are arising to exert their own influence (Edwards et al., 2018), and an increasing amount of foreign aid is arranged bilaterally rather than through international organizations (Mundy, 2016). In this context the GEMs Report is the flagship of UNESCO's efforts to be taken seriously in the global community (Edwards et al., 2018).

Both the Meriam Report and the GEMs report share so many interesting characteristics because they represent organizations seeking to maintain their legitimacy. The texts, with their heavy reliance on statistics and consciously deliberate production, are necessary for institutions to show doubters that they have an authority that must be acknowledged. The value they bring is in transmitting reassurances of the righteousness of the global order. "The surprising features of the contemporary world are: how much is shared, how much is universalized," writes sociologist John Meyer (2009, p. 37). The discursive practice of reports such as these are vital in symbolically legitimizing education as a hallmark of global homogeneity. These are not documents to be read but rather referenced, meant to reinforce soothing narratives of the legitimacy of assimilative practices. Whether expanding the school bureaucracy to Indigenous students or extending Western schooling to developing countries, the myths of progress through assimilation are central because they reaffirm the social and economic status of dominant cultures, providing a narrative shape that rationalizes an unequal world.

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Madhu is an Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership & Policy. He is interested in the global institutionalization of education and its influence on individuals. In particular, he explores how official discourses and institutional planning influence the everyday mindsets, beliefs, and actions of educators. These interests lie at the intersections of educational policy, comparative studies, and the anthropology and sociology of education. Prior to joining the faculty at Portland State University, he worked as a teacher and school leader in New York City.