

Rita Hofstetter and Bernard Schneuwly

The International Bureau of Education (1925–1968): “The Ascent From the Individual to the Universal”

Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024. 422 pp.

This monograph by Rita Hofstetter and Bernard Schneuwly of the University of Geneva in Switzerland forms part of the International Standing Conference for History of Education (ISCHE) book series, *Global Histories of Education*. The series, established in 2016, has provided a series of windows into international histories of education, both at the regional and at the transnational level. The transnational turn in historical research is of particular salience in the series, as Eckhardt Fuchs' and Eugenia Roldán Vera's first book, *The Transnational in the History of Education: Concepts and Perspectives*, underscores.¹ This volume looks specifically at the genesis, history, and development of an international organization related to education: the International Bureau of Education (IBE). As the authors document, the organization was created as a corporate association, the outcome of a series of fortuitous events; the support of the Rockefeller grant funded *Institute Jean-Jacques Rousseau (IR)*, the leadership of psychologist Pierre Bovet, who led both the *Institute Rousseau* and the IBE, and the encouragement of the Swiss Association of the League of Nations. Strategically, Bovet was able to secure the support of 82 “friends of the *Institute Rousseau*” from a wide cross-section of Geneva's international society to back the formation of the IBE (50). Pedagogues Edouard Calparède and Adolphe Ferrière were also instrumental in the foundation of the organization.

Hofstetter and Schneuwly's book proceeds chronologically from the introduction through a series of themes in Part I and Part II. These subjects illuminate the institutional history of the IBE. First established in 1925, the aim of the organization at that time was to focus on the provision of education, both private and public, to all states and students. For Hofstetter and Schneuwly, it was more than this; they assert that the goal of the IBE was a “matrix of educational internationalism, with the universal in mind” (3). The book then looks at the second-level objectives of the agency as it evolved. These included educational reformism, pacifist internationalism, and the creation of universalist ideals. The central axiom of the organization and the subtitle of the book, “Rising from the Individual to the Universal,” is then analyzed.

In the third section of their book, the authors examine the organization's International Conferences on Public Education (ICPE). These evolved from meetings at which a small group of sovereign states gathered in the early 1930s, to events which saw many states attend in late 1960s.

The focus is widened in Part IV to look at international issues and the role that the IBE played in these questions. The IBE's universalist aims sometimes clashed with the goals of authoritarian states in the postwar world. The Cold War also cast a

1 Eckhardt Fuchs and Eugenia Roldán-Vera, *The Transnational in the History of Education: Concepts and Perspectives* (Springer International Publishing, 2019).

pall over the activities of the IBE. This discussion is continued in the final section of the book, which examines, in quick succession, curriculum, the role of teachers, the importance of women, the significance of social justice, and lastly, the juxtaposition of colonialism and the equality of races and cultures.

The authors conclude by reemphasizing the historical importance of the IBE in terms of the challenges facing education, from the classroom to the globe, but also, the state of educational internationalism itself. The organization, in the authors' view, transformed into an intergovernmental organization dedicated to education and was the precursor to all subsequent international educational organizations. Additionally, by forming an alliance with UNESCO in 1945, the IBE was able to continue working on educational projects for the subsequent forty years until its incorporation as a category 1 institute into UNESCO in 1969. Central in this picture was the universality of education and the expectation that it be within reach of all. As the authors note, the push for universality was evident in the IBE's desire for universal access, their promotion of teaching methods that would encourage agreement amongst peoples, and through their annual surveys of all governments.

The authors underline the "spirit of Geneva," which pervaded the IBE and its activities (114–16). The universal development of children, pacificism, and liberal internationalism were seen as the basis of education systems that would at long last bring humanity together. The ICPEs were central to these efforts, and their outcome, after an exchange of reciprocal views, was non-binding recommendations on educational issues. The challenge of universality also clashed with the neutrality of the IBE. States grouped together in "clans" (i.e. anglophone states, developing states, etc.), which strained the effective operation of the organization (238). Further, the Second World War, the post-war, and the nascent Cold War imposed sometimes conflicting expectations on the organization from states which were its central members.

In the end, from Hofstetter and Schneuwly's perspective, the IBE was a petri dish in which to see international dialogue in the field of education. This was and remains what in essence is education diplomacy, or as the authors put it, educational internationalism.² This approach is far away from contemporary history whereby education and schooling are viewed as part of the global market and whereby there exists a global governing complex for international education.

This work is a refreshing take on this topic. As someone who first came across the IBE in the 1990s in while doing doctoral work on the history of education diplomacy in the Canadian context, and saw it from a different angle, this book is very energizing.³ Indeed, Hofstetter, Schneuwly, and the faculty working with them have made

2 The authors also discuss the two terms in their earlier article: Rita Hofstetter and Bernard Schneuwly, "Piaget, Diplomat of Educational Internationalism. From the International Bureau of Education to UNESCO (1929–1968)." *Paedagogica Historica* 59 no. 6 (2022): 1–18. There are also references to the Canadian context there. See Patricia Goff, "Cultural Diplomacy." in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, eds. Andrew Fenton Cooper, Jorge Heine and Ramesh Thakur (Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Simon L. Mark, "Rethinking Cultural Diplomacy: The Cultural Diplomacy of New Zealand, the Canadian Federation and Quebec," *Political Science* 62, no. 1 (2010): 62–83.

3 John Allison, *A Most Canadian Odyssey: Education Diplomacy and Federalism, 1844–1984* (Althouse Press/Western University, 2016).

this look at the IBE and education in Geneva a long-term project based on grants from the Swiss government.⁴ Their works have also been reviewed in this journal in French.⁵ One of the challenges for non-French speaking readers is that some of their work is in French.

This book also works well in the sense that it is not simply a written analysis of the role of the IBE. Rather, it looks at the question from a variety of perspectives. The work speaks to the primary sources used and provides images of these sources when helpful. This gives the reader a deeper sense of the events and the outcomes that emerged from these instances at the international level. Further, the book provides “inserts” (sidebar discussions), which address specific questions; in the example of Insert 11.1 (184), the discussion point is how did delegations get their ideas to centre stage at the International Conferences on Public Education? “Self-presentation” and “mention” (i.e. citation in separate delegations’ speeches to heighten and triangulate attention on an issue or controversy) were the two most cited strategies.

All in all, the book represents a well-crafted analysis of a very significant actor in international education governance in the early to middle twentieth century. That the IBE continues in 2025, its centenary year, is testament to its strength, perseverance, and durability.

John Allison
Nipissing University

Funké Aladejebi

Schooling the System: A History of Black Women Teachers

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021, 304 pp.

For nearly two decades, I have dedicated my professional practice to Ontario's public education system. I began my career as an elementary teacher in a Toronto school that served a predominantly Black student population. In North America, Black women teachers often work in Black neighbourhoods, engage with curricula that is white male dominant, witness the disproportionality of Black students in the discipline system, and endure racially motivated push-out from their school districts.⁶ Like other Black woman teachers, I was labeled as aggressive, undermined as a leader, and surveilled for centering Black children in my work. Indeed, Black women teachers'

4 Rita Hofstetter and Bernard Schneuwly, *The International Bureau of Education*, v–vi.

5 Amongst several examples is Riodel's review: Xavier Riodel, *Le Bureau International d'éducation, Matrice de l'internationalisme éducatif (premier 20e siècle)*, by Rita Hofstetter and ÉRHISE, *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 35 no. 1 (2023): 139–42. <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse-rhe.vi0.5181>.

6 J. L. Stovall and M. Mosely, “We just do us’: How Black Teachers Co-Construct Black Teacher fugitive space in the face of antiblackness” *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 26, no. 3 (2023): 298–317, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2022.2122424>.