


Paul Monroe and the Origins of American Comparative Education

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Abstract

Paul Monroe was a pioneering leader of international and comparative education. His greatest contribution to comparative education came from his leadership of the International Institute of Teachers College during 1923-1938, where he led and practiced the teaching and research on comparative education with dynamic international outreach and engagement in investigation of educational systems and conditions of many countries. Monroe played a key role in shaping the development of comparative education as an academic field during its formative years. He and his colleagues trained the first generation of comparative educators in North America and elsewhere. Paul Monroe was also significantly involved in the modernization of education in countries of Asia and the Middle East, when the influence of the United States expanded in these regions primarily via the work of private institutions in the first half of the 20th century.

Essay

Comparative education developed into an academic field of study at American universities during the 1920s-1930s, and Paul Monroe provided outstanding leadership in those formative years of the field.¹ Monroe started his career in higher education at Teachers College, Columbia University immediately after he received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1897. He was initially hired as an instructor of history and then promoted to full professor of education in 1902. He was named Barnard Professor of Education in 1925. He served as Director of the School of Education during 1915–1923 and became Director of the International Institute in 1923 till his retirement from Teachers College in 1938.² Monroe's greatest contribution to comparative education came from his leadership of the International Institute of Teachers College, which integrated teaching and research of comparative education with dynamic international educational engagements.

Teachers College was the cradle of the endeavor to make the study of education a scientific professional training in the United States. Monroe was one of the pioneers, along with John Dewey and Edward Thorndike, in this endeavor. Dean James Russell hired Monroe to tackle the tasks of investigating educational foundations and the history of past achievements and current practice in the United States and the world. Monroe proceeded to produce several important books on the history of education in the following years. He also took on the chief editorship of a five-volume tome, *A Cyclopedia of Education*, which was published in 1911-1913. More than one thousand scholars from different countries contributed essays to the *Cyclopedia of Education*. Monroe gained remarkable recognition in the intellectual world for his scholarly work and the *Cyclopedia* remained, for over half a century, the best comprehensive encyclopedia on education. Lawrence Cremin, historian of Teachers College and American history of education, credited Monroe with setting “a standard of respectability in every field of educational thought.”³

World War I brought about profound changes in American society as well as in American higher education. Influenced by President Woodrow Wilson’s vision for a new world order of democracy and American responsibility to that end, American intellectual and cultural internationalists took active roles in promoting democracy and world peace through educational and cultural programs for international understanding and goodwill. New York City witnessed the most active involvement of its cultural and social elites in the promotion of international cultural understanding for world peace and the exportation of American democracy for world progress. At Columbia University, President Nicholas Murray Butler emphasized education for democratic citizenship, while Dean James Russell of Teachers College, reflecting on the prewar education that glorified war heroes and the tragic impact on societies by the Great War, urged change in education for the purpose of maintaining world peace. Faculty and students expressed strong sentiment to seek more definite sympathy and more effective cooperation between countries. Teachers College therefore redesigned its curriculum to make education contribute to building democratic citizenship and harmonious international relations. Faculty at Teachers College, who considered democracy to be attained only through education, felt confident about the United States’ success in democratic education and its potential of

contribution to the world in this regard.⁴ Their advocacy for education for democracy and world peace was accompanied by a growing interest in other countries' educational systems and practices and comparative educational studies. Of the leading educators with strong interest in foreign societies and educational systems were Paul Monroe, John Dewey, William F. Russell, William Kilpatrick, and Isaac L. Kandel, to name a few.

Monroe had been promoting international education when he served on the International Relations Committee of the American Council on Education, the Institute of Social and Religious Research, the China Medical Board, and as a founding trustee of the Institute of International Education (originally a department of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace). Monroe believed that educational contact was of "the greatest advantage ... in cultivating international understanding and good will" and that the American model of democratic education could provide the foundation to achieve these goals.⁵ He argued that international cultural and educational contacts served to create shared knowledge of science and democracy in service of internationalism.⁶

When John D. Rockefeller, Jr. sponsored the International House Movement by financing the building of International House New York in 1921 to promote international understanding among and via students, Monroe saw the opportunity.⁷ He approached Rockefeller, Jr. about the necessity of creating an educational center for international students and persuaded Rockefeller, Jr. that special needs of foreign students had to be taken care of if American education was to make a major contribution to world democracy and human progress. Discussions between the Teachers College and the International Education Board, a Rockefeller philanthropy, resulted in the foundation's support for an International Institute at Teachers College with a grant of one million dollars over 10 years. Ten percent of the annual subsidy was to be used as tuition scholarship to recruit the most promising international students who would become leaders of their own countries.⁸

Monroe became the Director of the International Institute of Teachers College while William F. Russell served as the Associate Director.⁹ Faculty of the Institute included Isaac L. Kandel, Lester L. Wilson, Stephen P. Duggan, Thomas

Alexander, Milton C. Del Manzo, George S. Counts and Ruth McMurry.¹⁰ They offered a broad variety of courses on comparative education for both American and foreign students, including “Comparative Education Seminar,” “Contemporary Educational Movements Abroad,” “Education and Nationalism,” “Education of Women: Its History and Present Problems,” and “Foundations of National Education.” More than 7540 students took comparative education courses and many conducted field researches of different countries’ educational systems during the lifetime of the Institute from 1923 to 1938.¹¹

Faculty of the Institute spent months each year studying foreign societies and educational systems and conditions. Their research covered almost every region of the world — Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, central and eastern Europe, but western Europe was the main concentration, where international and comparative educational activities were actively pursued by educators in England, Germany and France. Faculty’s research led to numerous publications of books and articles that enriched the knowledge of educational systems and societies of different countries and helped lay the foundation for comparative education as a field of study in the United States. Some of their students became the pioneers of comparative education at different American universities in the 1920s and 1930s. Among them were William Clark Trow who joined the University of Michigan in 1927, Paul Hanna who went to Stanford in 1935, and William H. E. Johnson who taught at the University of Pittsburgh. In turn, their students spread “comparative education programs at the universities of Illinois, Southern California, Texas, Alberta, Arizona, and elsewhere.”¹²

The International Institute aimed to achieve three related goals: to train foreign education leaders, to connect American schools with foreign educational theories and practices, and to provide educational assistance to foreign countries upon request.¹³ Activities of teaching and research for the achievement of those goals, however, led to significant influence of American education in shaping the modernization of education in different countries, American educators’ dynamic investigation of educational conditions and systems abroad, and the development of comparative education programs in American universities. Major publications of the faculty at the International Institute that were related to comparative education included I. L. Kandel, *The Reform of Secondary Education in France*

(1924); I. L. Kandel and Thomas Alexander, *The Reorganization of Education in Prussia* (1927); Thomas Alexander and Beryl Parker, *The New Education in the German Republic* (1929); George Counts, *The Soviet Challenge of America* (1931) and *A Ford Crosses Soviet Russia* (1930); and Paul Monroe, *China: A Nation in Evolution* (1928). Significantly, Monroe and Kandel each published a book titled *Essays in Comparative Education* in 1927 and 1930 respectively. In 1932, Monroe published his second volume of *Essays in Comparative Education*, whereas Kandel, in 1933, published his *Comparative Education*, which became a classic in the field and remained a major textbook even after World War II. Overall, the faculty's publications embodied the core intellectual endeavor and achievements that helped the International Institute attain its purposes, but their publications also contributed, in addition to classes and lectures, to the development of comparative education as a new rising field. The International Institute became *the* center of comparative education studies in the United States, collaborating with European comparative education centers in London and elsewhere.

The Institute began the publication of *The Educational Yearbook* in 1924 with Issac. L. Kandel as the editor. *The Educational Yearbook* was a new type of scholarly publication that was indispensable in the dissemination of educational ideas and practices and the creation of knowledge in the study of comparative education. Of enormous importance to the teaching of comparative education, *The Educational Yearbook* provided the current and authentic information on educational developments and movements in the world, especially in those days when literature of that type was extremely limited. Faculty's first-hand observations of educational systems and trends in different parts of the world were crucial for the contents of *The Educational Yearbook*. Some volumes of the *Yearbook* treated educational systems of specific countries and regions, while others treated selected topics such as state and religion, rural education, adult education, missionary education, elementary, secondary, and higher education, and so on. Kandel's editorship of *The Educational Yearbook* from 1924 to 1944 laid a solid foundation of data for the field of comparative education and made himself the best informed authority on the subject. As a pioneer in the field, *The Educational Yearbook* circulated in many educational institutions in and outside the United States, exerting worldwide impact on comparative and international education. It was even instrumental in inspiring the publication of *Year Book of*

Education in London. In 1936, Monroe and Kandel both attended a conference on comparative education in Washington, D.C. that was called by the United States Commissioner of Education, in connection with a meeting of the American Council on Education. The conference passed a resolution to express appreciation to the International Institute of Teachers College for its contributions to comparative education and its publication of *The Educational Yearbook*.¹⁴ Kandel, a key figure of comparative education by then, was considered, to a great extent, Monroe's protégé.¹⁵ After the demise of the International Institute, Kandel continued the editor work of *The Educational Yearbook* in the Department of Comparative Education in the Division of Foundations of Education at Teachers College.¹⁶

The Institute library was vital to the work of the staff and students at Teachers College and the world of international and comparative education. The library housed tens of thousands of volumes on foreign and comparative education, including textbooks, educational statistics, books on the theories and practices of education, and numerous publications and pamphlets donated by governments, institutions and individuals the world over. Its outstanding collection was one of the world's best at that time and was fundamental for research and growth of knowledge of foreign and comparative education. Whenever comparative education courses were offered, *The Educational Yearbook* furnished the main source of information, and the library made available its immense collection.

Monroe was personally concerned about the well-being of foreign students at Teachers College throughout his career as a professor and educational leader. He was close to students from Asia as he was extensively involved in the educational affairs in China, Japan, and the Philippines. In this picture of 1916 Chinese Student Club at Teachers College,¹⁷ Paul Monroe was surrounded by Chinese students including Jiang Menglin, Hu Shi, Sun Ke, Tao Xingzhi and Lin Bing, all of whom became key leaders and scholars in Chinese cultural and educational modernization in the 1910s-1940s. Chinese students had great admiration for

Monroe and sought to study with him. They thought of Monroe as a great educator, knowledgeable, kind-hearted, righteous, modest and always ready to help others.¹⁸



Monroe's involvement in the Middle East increased after World War I. He examined the educational work of the Near East Relief in 1924 and 1926, and made policy suggestions regarding the care of 60,000 orphans and 40,000 semi-dependent children in Greece, Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Egypt.¹⁹ He served as an adviser to the six colleges of the Near East College Association and was a trustee of the Near East Foundation and the International College in Smyrna and the American College in Sofia. He was instrumental to educational reform in Iraq in the early 1930s when he was requested by the Iraqi king to conduct a survey, assisted by his former students who had become educational leaders in Iraq.²⁰ Monroe's advocacy of modern education carried the hallmark of American progressive education that emphasized practical learning to meet the needs of actual life. From 1932 to 1935, Monroe served as president of Robert College and the Constantinople Women's College in Turkey, while devoting half time as Director of the International Institute of Teachers College. He tried to implement his own advocacy of keeping education in pace with the national aspirations of a modern Turkey, but he failed to materialize his agenda of progressive education due to financial difficulties and other factors during the Great Depression.

Monroe's leadership of the International Institute, vital to the growth of comparative education, went far beyond Teachers College. The Institute collaborated with major national organizations in international education, such as the Institute of International Education and the American Council on Education, in receiving and entertaining foreign education commissions and leaders in the United States. Under Monroe's leadership, the Institute was constantly requested by foreign governments to conduct surveys to assist their educational reforms. Those surveys (including ones on women's conditions) were often co-sponsored by American philanthropic organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation and usually conducted by educators from the larger community of Columbia University and other universities with some school superintendents. Dozens of countries were studied, including the Philippines, China, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and different parts of Africa and the Middle East. Consequently, substantial reforms of education took place in the Philippines, China, Puerto Rico and Iraq.²¹

Monroe's international education leadership was illustrated by his service as president of the World Federation of Education Associations, the Society for the Advancement of Education, and the Institute of Pacific Relations at various times. At the request of the Institute for Social and Religious Research, Monroe investigated and published the conditions and needs of schools for American children in China, Japan, Korea, India, and Europe in 1926. He also directed the International Examination Inquiry, a multi-year project sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Carnegie Corporation to instigate reform of educational systems worldwide. Educators from England, Scotland, France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States participated in the project.

Monroe also influenced international and comparative education by serving as editor of major publications in the field. He was editor of the *International Encyclopedia* (the education sector) at various times, and co-editor of the *International Yearbook of Education* with Nicholas Hans of King's College London, which was first published in 1933.²² Monroe was also co-editor of the *International Education Review*, the first internationally recognized journal of

comparative education, during 1931-1938. The journal was founded by Friedrich Schneider in Germany in 1930 but was taken over by the Nazi regime in 1934 to promote its ideology, as Erwin H. Epstein has pointed out.²³ There was little information on why Monroe continued to serve after 1934 when Nazi influence became eminently clear. Dean William Russell mentioned in 1931 that among the additional things the International Institute of Teachers College wished to do was publish an international education review, as requested by many of its constituents, but the Institute lacked financial resources to do that.²⁴

In summary, Monroe shaped the development of comparative education as an academic field in the 1920s-1930s when he and his colleagues researched and published numerous articles and books on the subject and trained the first generation of comparative educators in North America. Monroe was already a leading American educator with world influence when he began to head the International Institute of Teachers College. His distinguished career of educational leadership lay in his scholarship on history of education and comparative education, his training of educational leaders in the United States and abroad, his international engagement of education and his leadership in shaping the development of comparative education as a rising new field. For his extraordinary achievements, Monroe received honors from universities and governments of different countries. A true giant of his time, Paul Monroe has not been well studied yet by scholars.²⁵

¹ A different full version of article will appear in the book, *Notable Twentieth Century North American Comparativists of Education*, edited by Erwin H. Epstein, which is the 53rd volume in the series of Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, to be published by Routledge in 2019.

² Paul Monroe Faculty Profile, Pocketknowledge, <http://pocketknowledge.tc.columbia.edu/>, downloaded October 2017.

³ Lawrence A Cremin, David A Shannon and Mary Evelyn Townsend *A History of Teachers College, Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 42.

⁴ *Teachers College Bulletin* (May 12, 1923).

⁵ Paul Monroe, "Speech of 1924", Box 6B, RG 28, Paul Monroe Papers, Teachers College Special Collections.

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- ⁶ Paul Monroe, “‘The Cross-Fertilization of Culture:’ The Function of International Education,” *News Bulletin, Institute of Pacific Relations*, 1928.
- ⁷ For details, see Liping Bu, “Liberal Visions in a Conservative Age: The International House Movement,” in *Making the World Like US: Education, Cultural Expansion, and the American Century* (CT: Praeger, 2003).
- ⁸ Wickliffe Rose to Dean James Russell, February 8, 1923, Folder 275, Box 19, Series 1, International Education Board, Rockefeller Archive Center.
- ⁹ William Russell was son of Dean James Russell of Teachers College, who succeeded his father as Dean of Teachers College in 1927.
- ¹⁰ *Dean’s Report, Teachers College Bulletin*, June 30, 1924.
- ¹¹ William Russell, “Report on the International Institute January 1939,” Table III, “Courses in Comparative Education.” W. F. Russell Papers, Teachers College Special Collections.
- ¹² David N. Wilson, “Comparative and International Education: Fraternal or Siamese Twins? A Preliminary Genealogy of Our Twin Fields,” *Comparative Education Review*.38.4 (1994), 449-486.
- ¹³ Liping Bu, “Educational Assistance for World Progress,” in *Making the World Like US*.
- ¹⁴ W. Russell, “Report on the International Institute January 1939,” p. 24.
- ¹⁵ Wesley J. Null, *Peerless Educator: The Life and Work of Isaac Leon Kandel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).
- ¹⁶ W. Russell, “Report on the International Institute January 1939.”
- ¹⁷ The photo is from Teachers College online sources, courtesy of Teachers College, Columbia University.
- ¹⁸ Hongyu Zhou and Jingrong Chen, “Paul Monroe and Education of Modern China,” *Education Journal [Jiaoyu Xuebao]* 35.1 (2007): 1-38.
- ¹⁹ David M. Ment, “The American Role in Education in the Middle East: Ideology and Experiment, 1920-1940,” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 47.1&2 (2011): 173-189.
- ²⁰ Liping Bu, “International Activism and Comparative Education: Pioneering Efforts of the International Institute of Teachers College, Columbia University.” *Comparative Education Review* 41.4 (1997): 413-434.
- ²¹ “International Institute of Teachers College, Report of the Director,” *Teachers College Bulletin*, 1923 to 1937.
- ²² George Z. F. Bereday, *Comparative Method in Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), 239; and David Wilson, “Comparative and International Education,” 462 (see endnote 12).
- ²³ Erwin H. Epstein, “The Nazi Seizure of the *International Education Review*: A Dark Episode in the Early Professional Development of Comparative Education,” *Comparative Education*.54.1 (2017): 49-61.
- ²⁴ W. Russell, ‘Memorandum Concerning the International Institute of Teachers College’, submitted to the International Education Board by William Russell, May 25, 1931, Folder 280, Box 19, series 1, International Education Board, Rockefeller Archive Center.
- ²⁵ As I was completing this piece, *Comparative Education Review* published Keita Takayama’s article titled “Beyond Comforting Histories: The Colonial/Imperial Entanglements of the International Institute, Paul Monroe, and Issac L. Kandel at Teachers College, Columbia University.” Takayama offers an unbalanced critical assessment of the pioneering work of Paul Monroe and his colleagues of comparative education. Aside from the controversy of his sweeping dismissal of all the major writings

of the history of international and comparative education, Takayama fails to understand that the International Institute of Teachers College was primarily a product of the peace movement in post-WWI America. He cites my article, “International Activism and Comparative Education: Pioneering Efforts of the International Institute of Teachers College, Columbia University,” (*Comparative Education Review* 41.4 (1997): 413–434) to support his argument against elitism, but he misinterpreted and misrepresented my work and those of others on many occasions. He would have avoided making these mistakes if he had consulted broadly the works in the field, including my other publications such as “Cultural Understanding and World Peace: the Roles of Private Institutions in the Interwar Years,” *Peace & Change* vol. 24, no. 2 (April 1999): 148-171; “Education and International Cultural Understanding: The Elite American Approach, 1920-1937,” in *Teaching America to the World and the World to America: Education and Foreign Relations since 1870* (Richard Garlitz and Lisa Jarvinen, eds., Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 111-134; and my book, *MAKING THE WORLD LIKE US: Education, Cultural Expansion, and the American Century*.