

Academy Projects

Educating All Children

In 2001, the American Academy began the Universal Basic and Secondary Education (UBASE) project to advance the promise of a quality education for all children worldwide. The project presumed that universal education has the potential to help alleviate poverty, raise living standards, increase human dignity, and improve health (including reproductive health); but at the same time, the project understood that various obstacles stand in the way of meeting that goal, including:

- Nearly 30 percent of school-age children worldwide are not enrolled in school.
- Of school-age children who enter primary school in developing countries, more than one in four drops out before attaining literacy.
- There are gross disparities in education that separate regions, income groups, and genders.

Yet in advocating for universal education, the project quickly recognized a significant roadblock: the lack of knowledge of the basic facts about global education, as well as lack of knowledge of how these facts are produced and whether they are reliable. Education is one of the largest and most important investments made by governments and people. Understanding whether this investment leads to the desired ends is crucial to effective government policy and private decision-making.

To this end, the project endeavored to create a methodology, a new theoretical research base to underpin any inquiry into the role that primary and secondary education might play in creating positive global change. The Academy brought together an international team of scholars, program officers, educators, public servants, and business leaders, headed by Project Directors Joel E. Cohen (Rockefeller and Columbia Universities) and David E. Bloom (Harvard University), to consider fundamental questions about the costs,

means, and consequences of providing education to all children:

- What do we know about global education and how do we know it?
- What would be the consequences of providing every child with primary and secondary schooling?
- What is the history of efforts to expand education?
- What obstacles stand in the way of achieving universal education?
- What are the best practices and innovations for overcoming those obstacles?
- What will it cost to provide primary and secondary schooling for all children?

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By beginning with these questions, the project tackled first the soundness of advocating for universal education – the question of *whether* – before moving to questions of *what to do* and *how*.

Ultimately, the project offered five major recommendations:

- That a commitment must be made to extending a full cycle of high-quality primary and secondary education to all children;
- That more reliable data must be created and used in studying what children learn, what alternative pedagogical techniques and technologies exist, and which countries are performing best;



Joel E. Cohen



David E. Bloom

- That discussions about what stakeholders want primary and secondary education to achieve must take place openly at the national, regional, and international levels;
- That the diverse character of educational systems in different countries must be internationally recognized, and aid policies and assessment requirements must be adapted to local contexts; and
- That education must be allotted both more money and higher priority, especially in terms of the amount of funding that developed countries provide for education in developing countries.

The Academy has made the project's findings and recommendations public through a series of five Occasional Papers – *Measuring Global Educational Progress*; *Global Educational Expansion: Historical Legacies and Political Obstacles*; *Achieving Universal Basic and Secondary Education: How Much Will It Cost?*; *Education, Health, and Development: An Under-Explored Nexus*; and *Improving Education Through Assessment, Innovation, and Evaluation* – and two edited books: *Educating All Children: A Global Agenda* (MIT Press, 2006) and *International Perspectives on the Goals of Universal Basic and Secondary Education* (Routledge, forthcoming 2009). Many of the UBASE publications are posted on the Academy's website, www.amacad.org, and some of the publications have been translated and distributed in multiple languages.

PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

Edited Volumes

Educating All Children: A Global Agenda, edited by Joel E. Cohen, David E. Bloom, and Martin B. Malin, argues that universal education, urgently needed, can be achieved. The volume explores a key project finding: that it should be possible to give all children a decent primary and secondary education at a cost of up to an additional \$70 billion per year. On the one hand, this seems a rather modest sum, less than one-seventh of the U.S. government's annual military budget, and only one-fourth of the foreign aid goal of 0.7 percent of the \$37 trillion of gross national income of developed countries. On the other hand, it is a formidable amount, since foreign aid currently is substantially below the 0.7 percent target, especially in the United States.

What obstacles stand in the way of achieving universal education?

In addition, the project developed a methodology for estimating how many children worldwide are not in school. Project Co-Director David Bloom continues to develop this methodology.

The second book – *International Perspectives on the Goals of Universal Basic and Secondary Education*, co-edited by Joel E. Cohen and Martin B. Malin – explores the goals of education and addresses the “lack of focused international discussion on the desired content and aims of basic and secondary education,” as Cohen explains in the introduction.

International Perspectives draws together experts from many different regions, cultures, professions, and religious backgrounds to present a compelling, unified case for reassessing the goals and overhauling the methods of education systems that were designed and established at the height of an industrial period and that no longer fit



with the experience and needs of a globalizing world. Vimala Ramachandran, of the Educational Resource Unit in India, sounds the book's major theme when she calls for “the re-imagining of education” in order to link it to “life, livelihood, peace, and social justice.” For many of the contributors this means addressing the basic needs of children – secure classrooms, clean drinking water, hygienic bathrooms, nutritious food, and

What will it cost to provide primary and secondary schooling for all children?

well-trained and well-compensated teachers – as well as building on that foundation to enrich education, without spending resources that may not be available in every society. Mexico's *dia* program, for example, integrates the teaching of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values through the use of art in the classroom, as Claudia Madrazo, of La Vaca Independiente, highlights in her chapter.

The volume takes up topics as varied as bilingual education, the coexistence of art and science in the curriculum, the importance of critical thinking, global civility and peaceful

negotiation, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Indeed, many of the authors agree that an increased appreciation of cultural diversity and an ability to work across different linguistic and knowledge-acquisition systems are necessary in the twenty-first century. The volume also weighs the balance between *access to* education and *quality of* education.

Related Publications

In addition to the Occasional Papers listed above, UBASE has been featured in *Daedalus*, the journal of the Academy; in *Finance & Development*, a publication of the International Monetary Fund; in *Prospects*, UNESCO's journal of comparative education; in an op-ed published in several languages in news outlets around the world; in an article by Joel Cohen for the December 2008 issue of *Nature*; and on the PBS *Wide Angle* series and the PBS website. The project has also produced numerous “spinoff” publications, such as a special issue of the *Comparative Education Review* on health and education, guest edited by David Bloom; articles in the journals *World Development* and *World Economics*; and a book published by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

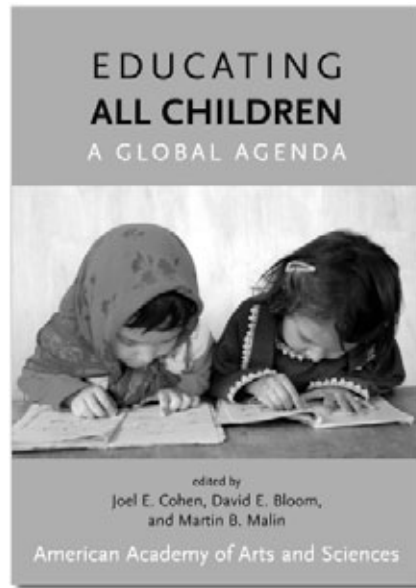
NEXT STEPS

The Academy is seeking additional funding to translate the significant body of research developed from the UBASE project into concrete goals and strategies for implementation. Drawing on the Academy's extensive international network in the field of educational development, we are looking to partner directly with donors, local universities, and other institutions responsible for training educators and delivering education in specific countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, to build indigenous capacity for assessing and improving educational expansion efforts. The Academy will actively engage local representatives as we jointly consider what needs to be done to make educational improvement and expansion possible. Underlying this effort is the belief that a participatory approach that combines the expertise of local, national, and international practitioners, scholars, and policy-makers is vital to the reform of educational systems.

The UBASE project has created sound methodology for studying global education and has outlined concrete recommendations for action toward achieving universal education.

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We are confident that these building blocks provide the necessary background for future investigation by academics and policy-makers active in the field of educational development, and that they persuasively make the case for providing basic and secondary education for children worldwide. It may be a big task, but it is one that can be met in the twenty-first century. ■