

## Examining the History of Education

As of early 2000, 113 million children of primary school age remained out of school, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Meanwhile, “the total number of young people aged 6 to 17 in the less-developed regions is expected to grow by more than 100 million in the next quarter century,” observes Joel E. Cohen (Rockefeller and Columbia Universities), co-chair of the Academy’s Universal Basic and Secondary Education (UBASE) project. “The challenge of educating all the world’s children will not get smaller soon.”

On September 6–7, 2003, the Academy’s UBASE project convened a group of historians, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, educational policymakers, and public health experts from

around the world to discuss the history of educational expansion and its significance for ongoing efforts to achieve universal education.

In the past, the project of nation-building and economic development provided the political energy for expanding education systems. But today the political and economic rationales of the past are proving inadequate for mobilizing the political will necessary to reach universal enrollment, observed Academy Fellow Kenneth Prewitt (Columbia University). This is especially true in countries where only a minority of children still lack access to schools. Several participants noted a shift in the discourse among education advocates. Past arguments linking education to economic development have given way to those empha-



Aaron Benavot  
and Julia Resnick

sizing social justice and, more recently, national security.

At the workshop, Aaron Benavot and Julia Resnick (both of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem) presented a paper examining the origins of compulsory education and the means by which the relatively standard model of education emerged and spread globally. Benavot and Resnick also considered the role of international and nongovernmental organizations in promoting the spread of education. The group discussed the relevance of historical experience to solving contemporary problems such as restricted access to school caused by poverty, gender, race, ethnicity, and rural locale.

The UBASE project, co-chaired by Cohen and David E. Bloom (Harvard School of Public Health), is investigating the rationale, feasibility, and consequences of provid-

ing every child in the world with an education of high quality. The study will produce a series of Occasional Papers and other communications on topics ranging from the cost of achieving universal education to the use of new technologies for educational expansion. A forthcoming paper, “Assessment: Measuring Progress Toward Universal Education,” by Henry Braun (Educational Testing Service) and Anil Kanjee (Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa), examines the way in which standardized evaluative tools affect contemporary efforts at educational expansion. The first Occasional Paper published by the project, “The Consequences of Global Educational Expansion: Social Science Perspectives,” appeared in April 2003 and can be downloaded from the Academy’s website at [www.amacad.org/publications/occasional.htm](http://www.amacad.org/publications/occasional.htm). ■



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