

RECOMMENDATION No. 28

concerning

THE TEACHING OF READING

(1949)

The International Conference on Public Education,

Convened at Geneva by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Bureau of Education, and being assembled on the fourth of July for its twelfth session, adopts on the twelfth of July, nineteen hundred and forty-nine, the following recommendation:

The Conference,

Considering that reading is not only a basic educational technique involving a whole group of mental processes, but is also the chief means of achieving knowledge and full cultural development;

That a child should always learn to read with full understanding of what he is reading;

That the teaching of reading cannot be dissociated from the teaching of the mother tongue and its various means of expressions or from the first steps in writing;

That developments in psychology and educational theory permit an increasing use of methods better adapted to a child's capabilities;

Recognising that:

a) methods, such as the phonetic method, satisfy the demands of adult logic and facilitate a teacher's task, but begin with separate elements (e.g., sounds, letters or symbols) of little significance to the child mind,

b) methods based on psychology (the so-called sentence or “global” methods), conform more to the mental capacity of a child, and enable the teaching of reading to be correlated to a greater degree with general class activities, but call for a fuller training of the teacher.

Believing that the choice of reading methods is influenced among other things by the structure of the language and by the school organization of each country,

Taking into account these various points,

Submits to the Ministries of Education of the various countries the following recommendation:

1) That school authorities be above all concerned to:

a) teach every child of school age and every illiterate adult to read fluently,

b) improve the relevant teaching methods through research and experiment, and

c) ensure by every possible means that adolescents continue to be able to read fluently, after they have left school;

2) That reading be introduced only when a child has already achieved a sufficient command of words and had the necessary sensory-motor training, and is thus adequately prepared;

3) That school organization be such that a teacher is able to remain with his pupils until their first steps in reading are concluded;

4) That, wherever possible, methods of teaching children to read incorporate the findings of educational theory;

5) That a taste for reading be developed from the outset by the use of sentences and good reading matter associated with a child’s immediate interests and activities, and that this taste be sustained throughout the whole of a child’s school life by the establishment and continual enlargement of school libraries;

6) That school printing presses, which are invaluable aids in teaching, be encouraged;

7) That both reading primers and books for leisure-time reading (whether for children or adults) be adapted to the mental development and the interests of their readers, special attention being given to subject matter and the choice of type and illustrations;

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8) That children having special difficulty in learning to read be given supplementary teaching suited to their needs;

9) That tests of oral and silent reading be used, so that the results obtained at various ages may be objectively measured and compared;

10) That in view of the need to combat adult illiteracy in many parts of the world, a concerted effort be made to develop mass techniques of language teaching, to prepare suitable reading material, and to exchange experience among the nations concerned with this problem.