

RECOMMENDATION No. 46
TO THE MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION
concerning
THE PREPARATION AND ISSUING
OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
(1958)

The International Conference on Public Education,

Convened in Geneva by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Bureau of Education having assembled on the seventh of July, nineteen hundred and fifty-eight for its twenty-first session adopts on the fifteenth of July, nineteen hundred and fifty-eight the following Recommendation:

The Conference,

Considering that present-day development is characterized by rapid changes in the knowledge, social systems and activity of mankind,

Considering that the schoolchildren of today will grow up into a world widely influenced by the application of science to all types of activity,

Considering that although progress in educational science is to a great extent a product of the evolution of ideas, discussion and the exchange of opinions, the first requirement is objective research on educational problems,

Considering that the preparation of curricula must take into account both the ability and interests of the individual boy or girl and the needs of society,

Considering that the basic purpose of primary education is to give children, together with a love of and a respect for work, the necessary equipment for acquiring knowledge and developing their whole personality,

Considering that the primary school should provide opportunities for its pupils to undertake tasks which challenge their best efforts,

Considering that for their work to be fully efficient, teachers should enjoy adequate freedom, within the syllabus, in the choice of topics and methods, enabling them to work at a pace suited to themselves and to their pupils,

Considering that educators are unanimous in condemning overwork and the overloading of primary school syllabuses,

Considering that primary school pupils should be protected against any tendency to overload them with studies and responsibilities beyond the range of their age and differing abilities,

Considering that, in spite of similar aspirations, countries in very different positions must reach varied solutions of the problem of the preparation and issuing of the primary school curriculum,

Submits to the Ministries of Education of the different countries the following Recommendation:

Principles governing the preparation of primary syllabuses

1) There has frequently been confusion in various countries between the meaning of the terms primary education and compulsory education; wherever these two do not coincide, the tendency to attribute to primary education aims which are foreign to it, often resulting in an overloading of primary syllabuses, should be resisted.

2) In all countries, primary education should aim:

a) at giving the child the basic instruments of thought and action suited to his age, which will enable him to live his personal and civic life to the full and to understand the world in which he has to live;

b) not only at transmitting a heritage and a culture, but also at providing the means of enriching them;

c) at turning out free human beings, who are aware of their responsibilities, have self-respect and respect for others, and play an active and useful part in the national life.

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3) One of the main aims of modern education should be to prepare children to take a conscious and active part, appropriate to their age and stage of development, in the life of the family, the community and the nation, and in building a more fraternal world society, rich in variety but united in the pursuit of common aims: peace, security and fruitful collaboration among all men.

4) All curricula should include three elements: knowledge to be assimilated, skills to be mastered, and means of satisfying physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual needs of an individual and a social nature.

5) In drawing up syllabuses for successive grades, children's capacity to understand and assimilate at various stages of growth should be taken into account in order to ensure that they receive a well organized intellectual education proceeding at a normal pace.

6) In fixing the content of syllabuses, regard should be had not only to children's mental processes, but also to their interests and needs and to the whole of their emotional life and their health.

7) Every teaching programme must take into account the standard of the teacher and the actual working time available to both teachers and pupils.

8) In drafting primary school syllabuses, it should be remembered that moral and intellectual development should have the following aims: learning to learn, learning to think and to express oneself, learning to act and learning to behave.

9) Syllabuses offering an accumulation of subject matter should be replaced by a selection of essential topics.

Drafting procedure

10) Whatever the system of educational administration in force in a country, the drafting of syllabuses should be the work of specialized bodies, either permanent or temporary.

11) Committees responsible for drafting primary syllabuses should include, in addition to practising teachers from the different levels of education, specialists in the different branches of educational science and child psychology.

12) It would, in certain circumstances, be helpful if authorities responsible for the preparation and revision of primary syllabuses worked in conjunction with representatives of parents, of cultural circles and of the national economy, whether these be employers or employees.

13) The attention of the responsible authorities is drawn to the danger of too rapid and improvised a method of drawing up and revising primary syllabuses.

14) All work on the preparation and revision of syllabuses requires very thorough preliminary documentation and research on the needs of the country, the ability of available teaching staff, the particular pace of the child's psychological development, comparative studies of primary syllabuses in other countries and the findings of educational experiment.

15) Since it is desirable that experimental-educational research should assume a role of major importance in the reform and revision of primary syllabuses, the number of centres and teachers undertaking such research, as well as the tools provided for their work, should be increased.

16) It is important to intensify the international exchange of information on the question of primary syllabuses.

Issuing and application

17) Experience has shown the advantages of giving syllabuses a preliminary trial of adequate length before they are issued, either in experimental schools or in ordinary primary schools.

18) Authorities responsible for issuing primary syllabuses necessarily vary according to the centralized or decentralized system in force in each country, in the first case, it is desirable that legislation on the issuing of syllabuses should leave room for considerable adaptation of these syllabuses to regional and local requirements.

19) In countries where primary school syllabuses are of a compulsory nature, it is desirable to leave head teachers and teachers themselves the necessary latitude to interpret and adapt them.

20) It is highly desirable to present the syllabuses with accompanying suggestions on method, which remind the teacher of the aims pursued and at the same time give him the information required for the practical application of the syllabuses.

21) When new syllabuses or new suggestions on method are issued, means should be used (lectures, conferences, study groups, talks by inspectors, etc.) to inform the teachers concerned of the principles underlying the proposed changes.

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22) All suitable steps should be taken to ensure that textbooks and teaching material should correspond to the new syllabuses.

23) Although it is obviously impossible to fix limits which would apply to all countries and to all areas of study, and although there are disadvantages in revising syllabuses at too close or too distant intervals, in principle a periodic re-examination should be undertaken in accordance with the progress of culture and teaching techniques, and with social change.