

RECOMMENDATION No. 53
TO THE MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION
concerning the
ORGANIZATION OF THE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION
(1961)

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 third of July, nineteen hundred and sixty-one, for its twenty-fourth session, adopts on the fourteenth of July, nineteen hundred and sixty-one, the following recommendation:

The Conference,

Considering the principles set forth in Recommendation No. 17 on the organization of pre-primary education, adopted on the nineteenth of July, nineteen hundred and thirty-nine, by the International Conference on Public Education at its eighth session,

Considering the need to provide a child from the earliest age with an education favourable to his full spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical development,

Considering that a young child's early education is both a primary duty and an inalienable right of his parents,

Considering that, although the family remains the most suitable environment for the child's development, parents require assistance, since even under the best of conditions they can no longer meet on their own all the educational needs of the young child when he approaches the age of four,

Considering that, owing to the increase in the number of women who have professional interests and of those who, for various reasons,

are overburdened with work at home, pre-primary education increasingly fulfils in modern life a social role in offering the child the security he needs and in taking care of his full development,

Considering that attendance at a pre-primary education establishment facilitates the transition from home to school,

Considering that attendance at a pre-primary education establishment favours the rapid identification of all physical or mental disorders, which can be cured or improved all the more easily if they have been detected as soon as possible, and that it is also very beneficial to physically handicapped children in that it accustoms them at an early age to living with other children,

Considering that the experience so far obtained offers an adequate basis for the formulation of principles and methods of pre-primary education,

Considering that pre-primary education requires of the educators who devote themselves to it both special training and also particular qualities and abilities,

Considering that, in each country, the problem of the extension of pre-primary education seems to be connected with the stage reached in the provision of education for children of school age, and that it is well to take into account the differences which may exist between areas, industrial or rural, where women workers are widely employed and other areas,

Considering that, despite similar aspirations, countries in very different positions must reach varied solutions of the problems of the organization of pre-primary education,

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

Possibilities of Introducing and Extending Pre-Primary Education

1) It is important that the authorities responsible for education should encourage the introduction, extension and progress of pre-primary education, taking into account the stage reached by education in each country and the situation in different localities.

2) Wherever compulsory schooling is already provided for all children without exception, educational facilities should be offered

to children of pre-primary age in so far as their numbers justify the opening of an institution or class of the corresponding type.

3) In countries where the provision of compulsory schooling for all has not yet been achieved, it is desirable, while reserving priority for the requirements of the primary school, to take steps for the development of pre-primary education facilities, particularly in industrial areas and in rural areas where women workers are widely employed.

4) It is desirable to take into account the fact that pre-primary education, while retaining its essentially educational character, also meets social needs which are assuming increasing importance in a changing world; for this reason it is indispensable to achieve very close collaboration between public and private education authorities, the medical and social services and the parents.

5) It is desirable for business concerns and institutions employing women to create and develop pre-primary education establishments in collaboration with the appropriate education authorities.

Administration, Supervision and Financing

6) In countries where pre-primary education exists, there should be a special department, under the education authorities, to deal with all questions concerning the development and improvement of pre-primary education establishments.

7) The various activities of the special pre-primary education department should include in particular:

a) a survey of the number of pre-primary age children and of their distribution in relation to the size of the population in their place of residence and to their home environment;

b) the collection of data on the number and type of pre-primary education establishments in existence, the proportion of public and private establishments in the total, and their attendance rate;

c) a consideration of the possibilities of extending pre-primary education and plans for this expansion;

d) the study of methodological problems raised by pre-primary education;

e) an examination of problems related to the selection, training, in-service education and professional status of teaching staff;

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f) the preparation of educational and technical standards and of regulations for the buildings and equipment used for pre-primary education;

g) the strengthening of collaboration between parents and teachers at pre-primary level.

8) It is the duty of the education authorities to arrange for the educational and health inspection of all pre-primary education establishments, whether public or private.

9) When justified by the numerical importance of pre-primary establishments, their supervision should be carried out by specialized inspectors; in other cases, supervision may be the responsibility of primary school inspectors specially prepared for this work.

10) The method of financing public pre-primary education establishments may vary according to the administrative structure of each country; it is, however, to be hoped that the cost of this type of education will be assumed not only by the local authorities but also by administrative authorities of a higher level.

11) In so far as establishments run by private initiative make up for a shortage of public provision for pre-primary education and offer adequate facilities for education and social welfare, these establishments should be able to count on financial assistance from the authorities.

Structure and Organization

12) Notwithstanding the benefit children can derive from attending a pre-primary education establishment, attendance should remain optional.

13) When an establishment is financed entirely by the public authorities, it is desirable that the children should be admitted free of charge.

14) The minimum age for admission to pre-primary education establishments varies with the characteristics of the different types of institution; the leaving age, however, should coincide with the statutory age for entering the primary school.

15) When pre-primary establishments are not numerous enough to accommodate all requests for admission, selection should be based primarily on consideration of the child's individual needs and family circumstances.

16) The number of children per teacher at pre-primary level should be lower than the number of pupils in a primary school class and should be proportionately smaller as the children are younger; it is desirable that the average number of children present should not exceed twenty-five.

17) The teacher should have the aid of an assistant and of essential ancillary staff, especially in establishments where social services are extensively provided.

18) The hours of opening and programme of activities in a pre-primary education establishment should be more flexible than in the primary school, so that they may be adapted as well as possible to the needs of the children and of their families; there may be establishments which are open only in the morning and others which are open all day and provide for the usual meals and indispensable rest periods.

19) In the country and wherever circumstances permit, seasonal pre-primary establishments, which are open while the parents are busy with important agricultural or other work, should become permanent in order to provide for the children's needs all the year round.

Educational Activities and Techniques

20) Pre-Primary education should use methods which take into account the most recent developments in the psychology of the small child and the progress of educational science; these methods will be based on action, which generally takes the form of play, either free or suggested; the sensorimotor and manipulative activities provided for the children (singing, drawing, rhythmic, etc.) help to awaken their personalities and to give them a sound emotional and mental balance.

21) Functional and individualized education, which is characteristic of the education of the young child, should not exclude group activities which contribute to character training, the education of the emotions and the development of the social sense.

22) At pre-primary level, it is important for intellectual education to be based on the observation of the immediate surroundings and the development of oral expression, and, although all formal instruction must be excluded from this type of education, it is possible, from the age of five onwards and in so far as the child shows sufficient maturity and interest, to introduce him to the skills he will learn in

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school by means of graphic expression, the organization of concrete situations which can only be solved through the use of measure and number, and the utilization of specially designed materials.

23) Adequate time should be reserved for open-air activities and a proper balance should be achieved between free and directed activities.

24) With the reservation that the above-mentioned principles must be adhered to, teachers at pre-primary level should have wide freedom in their choice of procedure and in the preparation of their programme of activities, while being sure that they have at their disposal sufficiently varied material and all indispensable equipment.

25) As pre-primary education plays an important part in caring for the children's health, it should foster in them good health habits; furthermore, it is essential that school medical and child guidance services should be made available for them at least to the same extent as for primary school pupils.

26) Collaboration with the family is essential in pre-primary education; the aim of this collaboration is to make parents aware of their educational responsibilities and help them to assume them; it should not be limited simply to meeting parents who bring their child to school, but should comprise regular interviews, talks, discussion groups, if possible the parents' participation in certain school activities, occasional visits from them during class time, and also home visits by the teacher and, if need be, the social worker.

27) Wherever possible, psychological and educational research on pre-primary education should be undertaken more widely and more thoroughly; it is important that members of the teaching staff and parents should be kept informed of the practical results of such research by means of articles, lectures, talks on the radio, various publications, etc.

Teaching Staff

28) As the education of children of pre-primary age presents psychological and educational problems of a particular kind, it is important that persons intending to take up this work should possess the necessary qualities and receive a specialized training which should be supplementary to a general training in education, and to this end it is desirable to create pilot institutions attached to teacher training establishments.

29) The studies and qualifications required of pre-primary teachers should be at least of the same standard as those required of primary teaching staff.

30) Where there is a shortage of qualified pre-primary teachers, it might be useful to organize emergency specialization courses for persons already possessing some educational experience and the necessary abilities, to be followed later by in-service training which would gradually place them on the same level as qualified pre-primary teachers.

31) It is desirable to provide for teachers at pre-primary level, as for all other categories of teachers, opportunities for improving their efficiency and methods, whether by means of vacation, correspondence or other courses, or by lectures on education, periods of work in pilot institutions, etc.

32) Qualified pre-primary teachers should enjoy the same status (salary, working conditions, holidays, etc.) and the same advantages as primary teaching staff.

33) Equality as regards training status and remuneration would help to facilitate the transfer of teachers from pre-primary to primary establishments, or vice versa; if necessary, suitable reorientation courses should be provided for the teachers concerned.

Building and Equipment

34) All possible steps should be taken to ensure the children's safety; in towns, pre-primary education establishments should be situated near the parents' homes in order to reduce traffic dangers and avoid the use of transport.

35) All pre-primary education establishments should have their own buildings; they should possess a playground specially equipped to promote outdoor activities and also a garden, which, in addition to its aesthetic value, would permit the observation of nature, gardening and the rearing of small animals.

36) If premises intended for pre-primary education cannot form a separate building, they should be situated on the ground floor, in rooms which are sufficiently large and light, with an exit onto a playground reserved for children of pre-primary age and specially equipped for their use.

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37) When the authorities issue licenses for the building of new housing estates, they should require, among other things, the provision of an adequate number of pre-primary education establishments, each having a playground which might remain at the children's disposal when the establishment is closed.

38) Particular care should be given to the decoration, furnishing and equipment of pre-primary education establishments; all these various elements should be adapted to the physical, educational and aesthetic needs of the children in accordance with their age; the younger the children the more free space should be placed at their disposal in each room.

39) As training in hygiene and cleanliness is an integral part of pre-primary education, it is important that special attention should be given to the provision of a supply of drinking water and that the sanitary installations should be adapted to the children's various ages and kept constantly in a state of perfect cleanliness and in good working order.

40) Pre-primary education establishments which fulfil a social purpose and in which the children remain all day must possess the necessary equipment for the preparation and distribution of meals and for the indispensable rest periods; facilities should also be provided for temporarily isolating any child who may fall ill during the day.

International Collaboration

41) It is desirable that countries which are contemplating the introduction of a system of pre-primary education should be able to call upon the help of experts from other countries with a view to the organization of pilot institutions and of courses for the training of specialized staff.

42) It would be useful for all countries, including those where pre-primary education already exists, to organize seminars and conferences at the international level for the examination of problems relating to young children and pre-primary education, and to facilitate the exchange of documents (official regulations, reports, specialized publications, films, children's books, educational materials, etc.) among teachers and specialists from the different countries; in this connection the cooperation of Unesco, the International Bureau of Education, the World Organization for Early Childhood Education, and other educational organizations and associations of a world-wide or regional nature might be called upon.

43) A scholarship system should assist specialists in pre-primary education to travel abroad or take courses in countries where this type of education is particularly well developed and especially where the economic, population and other conditions most resemble those of their own country.

Implementation

44) It is important that the text of this recommendation should be widely diffused by Ministries of Education, the school authorities for the level of education most directly concerned, national and international teachers' associations, etc.; the educational press, whether official or private, should play a large part in the diffusion of the recommendation.

45) Unesco regional centres, with the collaboration of the ministries concerned, are invited to facilitate the study of this recommendation at the regional level with a view to its adaptation to the special characteristics of the regions concerned.

46) In countries where it seems necessary, Ministries of Education are invited to request the competent bodies to undertake certain activities such as, for example:

a) to examine the present recommendation and to compare it with the de jure and de facto situation in their respective countries;

b) to consider the advantages and disadvantages of implementing each of the clauses not yet in force;

c) to adapt each clause, should its implementation be considered useful, to the requirements of the individual country; and

d) to suggest the regulations and practical measures which should be taken to ensure the implementation of each clause examined.