



General Conference
30th Session, Paris 1999

30 C

30 C/62
(30 C/COM.II/3)
16 November 1999
Original: English

DRAFT REPORT OF COMMISSION II

Excerpts:

Decision on linguistic diversity and multilingual
education

Decision on International Mother Language Day

The General Conference,

Recognizing the need to improve understanding and communication among peoples,

Recognizing the great importance of safeguarding the linguistic and cultural heritage of humanity and extending the influence of each of the cultures and languages of which that heritage is composed,

Considering the current threat to linguistic diversity posed by the globalization of communication and the tendency to use a single language, at the risk of marginalizing the other major languages of the world, or even of causing the lesser-used languages, including regional languages, to disappear,

Considering that educating young people throughout the world involves sensitizing them to dialogue between cultures, which engenders tolerance and mutual respect,

Considering that substantial progress has been made in the last few decades by the language sciences, but that insufficient attention has been paid to the extraordinary ability of children to reproduce sounds at “key periods” of their development,

Noting that the ability of children to acquire phonetic and grammatical skills has been scientifically corroborated,

Considering that these skills enable young children to acquire competence at an early age in real communication, both passive and active, in at least two languages, whatever they may be,

Aware that democratic access to knowledge depends on a command of several languages and that provision of such access for all is a duty at a time when private language training, which is both expensive and elitist, is spreading in many countries,

Mindful of the resolutions adopted in support of bilingual education at the 18th and 19th sessions of the General Conference of UNESCO (1974 and 1976),

Taking into account the establishment by the Executive Board of UNESCO in October 1998 of an Advisory Committee for Linguistic Pluralism and Multilingual Education and the creation of the Languages Division by the Director-General in 1998,

Recommends that Member States:

1. Create the conditions for a social, intellectual, media and international environment conducive to linguistic pluralism;
2. Promote, through multilingual education, democratic access to knowledge for all citizens, whatever their mother tongue, and build linguistic pluralism. Strategies to achieve these goals could include:

the early acquisition (in kindergartens, nursery schools) of a second language in addition to the mother tongue, offering alternatives;

further education in this second language at primary-school level through an approach based on the medium of instruction, i.e. by using two languages for the acquisition of knowledge throughout the school course up to university level;

intensive and transdisciplinary learning of at least a third modern language in secondary school, so that when pupils leave school they have a working knowledge of three languages - which should represent the normal range of practical linguistic skills in the twenty-first century;

an assessment of secondary-school leaving certificates promoting a grasp of modern languages from the point of view of communication and understanding;

international exchanges of primary- and secondary-school teachers, offering the latter a legal framework for teaching their subjects in schools in other countries, using their own languages and thus enabling their pupils to acquire both knowledge and linguistic skill

due attention in education, vocational training and industry to the potential represented by minority languages, where they exist, and regional languages, migrants' languages of origin);

availability to teachers and education authorities of a computerized network, including a database, to facilitate exchanges of information and experience;

establish a "national and/or regional committee to study and make proposals on linguistic pluralism" in order to initiate the necessary dialogue between the representatives of all professions and all disciplines so that they can identify the main lines of a language education system which is adapted to each country but which also facilitates international communication, while preserving the rich and inalienable linguistic and cultural heritage of humanity.

3. Encourage the study of the languages of the major ancient and modern civilizations, with a view to safeguarding and promoting a literary education;

The General Conference invites the Director-General to implement this resolution in consultation with the Advisory Committee for Linguistic Pluralism and Multilingual Education.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION CONTAINED IN DOCUMENT 30 C/5

- 30 C/DR.35 (submitted by Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia; supported by Oman, Benin, Sri Lanka, Egypt, the Russian Federation, Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Belarus, the Philippines, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Honduras, Gambia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Comoros, Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Lithuania, Italy and the Syrian Arab Republic) relating to paragraph 05204, the Commission recommends that the General Conference proclaim "International Mother Language Day" to be observed on 21 February.