

# Jenaplan and pedagogical tact in an open view to educate children.

## Preface

This chapter will introduce the reader to the Jenaplan concept, a teaching approach that was founded by the German educator Peter Peterson (OECD, 2012). Within the Jenaplan setting learning is seen as an ongoing process, guided by a teacher, and based on the individual and developmental needs of the child. This will include a discussion on the implementation of a 'pedagogical tact' approach and support reflection on its effectiveness in the development of sensitive child-adult relationships.

## Glossary

Kindcentrum: not just one school in a building, but including a number of other child care facilities such as a library, day care centre and family centre.

Group leader: teacher in a Jenaplanschool.

Innovation school: school that has an innovative approach to education.

Jenaplan: vision on education, founded by Peter Petersen.

Pedagogical tact: doing the right thing, at the right time also in the eyes of a child.

World orientation: geography, history, religious, biology and humanities from an holistic point of view. Learning by connecting the subjects to form an integrated view of the world we live in, both as a child and an adult.

## Context

The Jenaplan approach is based on providing children with the opportunities to become independent, active learners who are able to develop the appropriate skills that are necessary to operate successfully within a democratic society; a responsibility that is shared by the school, children and parents. This progressed into a whole-school philosophy with the adoption of a 'pedagogical tact' approach which will be explored further in the chapter.

## Peter Peterson and Jenaplan

Peter Peterson, a German educator and philosopher, founded the Jenaplan approach. Born in 1884, he was the oldest of seven children, growing up on a farm where he took an active role in supporting the family (Melkusová, 2011). A graduate of the University of Leipzig, he began his teaching career in Hamburg in 1909 where he began to pilot some of his ideas, before moving to Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena as a professor of education in 1923. During this time, he was able to develop his approach at the university's pilot school. This,

together with his experience of being a part of a large family community, impacted significantly on the formulation of the Jenaplan approach.

Peterson recognised the importance of the social environment and the role of the community and wanted to develop an approach which encouraged children's independence and personal development. He viewed education as training for living within a democracy, and believed that children should learn within an environment which encouraged them to engage in shared decision making and to be responsible for the outcomes of these decisions.

## **Basic principles**

The underlying philosophy of practice in Jenaplan-schools has been formulated in 20 basic principles - 5 about man, 5 about society and 10 about schools. All Jenaplan-school take these principles as a basis for the development of their school:

### **Humans**

- Everyone is a unique person, with an inherent and inalienable value and dignity.
- Everyone has the right to develop an own identity, regardless race, nationality, gender, sexual disposition, social environment, religion or life-view. This identity has to be characterized by at least independence, critical consciousness, creativity and a sense for social justice.
- Everyone needs, for developing an own identity, personal relationships with the material, social, cultural and spiritual reality.
- Everyone is always recognized as a total personality and, where possible, approached and acknowledged in this way.
- Everyone will be recognized as an innovator of culture and, where possible, approached and acknowledged in this way.

### **Society**

- People have to work on a society that esteems everyone's inalienable value and dignity.
- People have to work on a society that gives room to and is stimulating for the development of an own identity for everyone.
- People have to work on a society in which differences (between individuals and groups) and changes are dealt with in just, peaceful and constructive ways.
- People have to work on a society in which earth and space are managed with respect and care.
- People have to work on a society in which natural and cultural resources are used in responsibility for future generations.

## **School**

- School is a relative autonomous, cooperative organization of all people concerned.
- In the school adults have to take fore-going principles about man and society as a pedagogical basis for acting.
- In the school curriculum content is derived from the children's life-world and (inner)experience and from the cultural sources considered in our society as important means for the development of persons and society as described earlier.
- In the school teaching takes place in pedagogical intended situations and with pedagogical teaching-learning materials.
- In the school teaching and learning are shaped by a rhythmic alternation of the basic-activities dialogue, play, work and celebration.
- In the school children are predominantly placed in heterogeneous groups.
- In the school exists an alternation of developmental teaching and independent playing and learning of children.
- In the school discovery/inquiry-learning and cooperative working in groups have an important place.
- In the school the behaviour and achievement of the children are judged as much as possible from the personal development of this child and in consultation with this child.
- In the school changes are seen as a never ending process, guided by a consistent interaction of action and reflection.

A Jenaplan school has no class timetable, but instead follows a rhythmic weekly schedule which consists of four important pedagogical activities: dialogue, play, work and celebration (to build the sense of community (Azevedo and Ferreira, 2012)). Examples of these curriculum cycles can be found in the OECD (2012) Case Study. The underlying philosophy of practice in Jenaplan-schools has been formulated around 20 basic principles under the headings: Man, Society and School. All Jenaplan schools take these principles as a basis for the development of their school vision and as starting point for their education (Table 1).

## **Jenaplan in the Netherlands**

The education of children in schools began with the Romans in the fourth century BC, with a focus on numeracy and literacy. In the early ages of education, schools in the Netherlands were led by the churches and were only meant for the wealthy. These monastery schools prepared children for church, where they were taught about the Bible and how to sing in the church choirs. Around the sixteenth century, more schools were established but these were still managed by the different churches. At first, reading and writing were prioritised, and boys and girls were not allowed to go to the same schools. Order was maintained with the 'slice', a wooden plank, the roe, and a bunch of willow branches. When using these the teacher had to ensure that s/he did not break their legs, hit them on the head or cause the

child to bleed. Education was harsh, being 'imposed' by teachers and 'consumed' by children (Onderwijsgeschiedenis, 2018).

Many changes took place in the second half of the nineteenth century, including the addition of more curriculum topics. In addition to reading, writing and religious education, numeracy and geography were added to the lesson program. In 1876, the first training college for teachers was founded and school supervisors started to visit schools in order to develop pedagogical approaches and improve children's education experience. This way of teaching was maintained until the early twentieth century. Petersen questioned this and believed that children should have an input to their education. This was new for many children who, according to their upbringing and education, were used in being told what to do, think and act. Petersen gave them back their own voice, brain and the tools to learn. This included taking responsibility for their own learning in a group.

Suus Freudenthal-Lutter (1908-1986) was the first person to introduce Jenaplan education to the Netherlands in 1955. Active in the 'Working Community for Renewal of Education', as a mother she had been disappointed in the education that her children received. In Petersen's Jenaplan, she discovered the school she had been looking for, for a long time. She can rightfully be called the 'mother' of the Dutch Jenaplan movement, which grew as a result of her intellect, energy and organizational talent. As a result, the first Jenaplan School was opened in 1962, with numbers growing rapidly, following the establishment of the Jenaplan Foundation in 1968. There are now approximately 200 Jenaplan schools in the Netherlands, with a dedicated web-site to provide additional information (Nederlandse Jenaplan Vereniging). The opportunity to offer alternative forms of education is a key feature of the Dutch education system, providing freedom to establish schools and decide upon the principles on which the school will be based (Altinyelken & Karsten, 2015).

Jenaplan builds upon the key aspects of daily life; with children encouraged to talk together, play, work and celebrate differences. There is a natural balance between basic activities; providing opportunities for effort and relaxation, being busy and reflecting, talking and listening, and preparing and exercising. The task of the group leader (Jenaplan does not use the word 'teacher') is to let each child work to their own pace, and to determine the rhythm of the group. A key aspect of Jenaplan is the grouping of children. In keeping with the traditional 'family' structure, children are placed into three heterogeneous age family groups:

- The kindergarten group (4 to 6 years),
- The intermediate stage (6 to 9 years) and,
- The upper stage (9 to 12 years).

Within these groups, a pedagogical learning environment is developed with all children being challenged and encouraged to participate, to think and to learn. The case study examples that are used are similar to activities that are experienced across all age groups. The central focus of the curriculum is 'world orientation' which includes learning about geography, history, religion, biology and humanities from a holistic point of view. It is supplemented by activities to support the development of language, reading, mathematics, creativity and skills of inquiry. In summary, the basic division within the curriculum is between world orientation and a range of supplementary courses. The Jenaplan approach is not a rigid model, but one that individual schools will adapt and develop to meet the needs of children and families in their community.

### **Theory in Practice: a personal perspective**

De Dukdalf is one of many schools situated in the town of Leiden and the only Jenaplan school. It is also part of 'PROOLEIDEN', an association of 16 schools, of which de Dukdalf is the only 'innovation' school. The OECD (2012, p. 3) defines a school as "innovative" when its "pedagogical concept and organizational structure" are significantly different to traditional programs. Its aim is to teach children to be independent and self-steering and is recognised as a 'quirky school'; we do not like to follow every rule, instead we like to choose our own path, something that I am very proud of.

In our school every child has the right to be different; every child is unique. We use words such as time, space and criteria, in working with children - one child's time can be totally different from another child's time. One child may not need as much time for an assignment as another child, and we discuss this with the children. For example, we will ask them how much time they need, giving them responsibility for managing their own time. Space can be literally the space in which you work, but also the figurative 'space' you give a child. Similarly, learning criteria can be different because the intelligence, concentration and working attitude is not the same for every child. The following case study explores this in more detail.

#### **Personal Space (4- 12 year olds)**

Space is a concept that can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. Each person needs an amount of space in which to move, to act and to breathe; but they also need a space to work. A child not only needs physical space, but also mental space which is of great importance for a child's development. In addition to 'pedagogical tact', we also practise 'pedagogical contact' which means entering a (professional) relationship with the children. In this relationship, every child and adult (the teacher) has their own space. It is possible that a child will find a teacher for a hug, whilst another child is happy with an encouraging wink or pat on the back.

De Dukdalf is part of the Kindcentrum Dukdalf. In the building, our school has 19 classrooms, and also the use of a loft, kitchen, gym and central hall. Outside is a separate schoolyard where only the children of de Dukdalf can play. In addition, the building is home to a day care centre. Every six weeks there is a consultation between delegates from each area. Our children may work in the other parts of the building if others are not bothered by them. There is an agreement with all children that they have to listen to every adult in the building who speaks to them about their behaviour. We give children the confidence that they can also do their work in a different location other than the classroom. It is therefore possible that children choose to work in the corridor, in the loft or in the office of the principal.

In addition, we give children more responsibility for their own development; they can choose if they want to attend full instruction, or just a part-instruction. They are challenged in the amount of work they can do in a day or week, and they can choose where to do their work. This does not all happen at once, but children will learn from their older peers. Giving responsibility is something that takes place gradually: as we talk to the children about their choices and what they can do, in/at what time, and where in the building. The instruction also changes: not every child needs to have the same instruction, so children are challenged to look at their own education needs. Teachers need to know what the children in their group know; they have to 'stand above' the teaching.

#### **Promoting independence (4 – 12 year olds)**

Children learn to plan their work. The instruction for different courses will be explained at the beginning of the week and they complete their own timetable for the processing of the instruction. Children are introduced to independent working when they begin school at four. A digital story board is used to allow children choose an activity by placing their own picture under a picture of that activity. The teacher and the child, together with others in the group, can see who has chosen what activity and which activities are still available to choose from. The duration of an activity may differ for each child as we understand that a four-year-old child has less concentration than a six-year-old child.

When the children start their primary studies, we assume that the basis for independent work has been laid. Between the ages of four to seven, we continue giving children more responsibility and self-reliance, working to ensure that children can independently carry out assignments after they have received instruction at the beginning of the week.

There are also books at the front of the group on a table: when children have completed their assignments, they can work on these. Children fill in their plan and start to work;

some of them use a half-hour for writing, whilst another child takes fifteen minutes. The teacher walks around the group and answers any questions.

When children go to the next level in the school, they are already very capable to plan their own work. Similar to the younger groups, the teacher gives instruction and the children process this independently. The older children of the group help the younger children to find the materials. If they are able to help someone else, they will initial what they have learned, and identify what he/she has learned by teaching a younger child.

In addition to following the Jenaplan vision and principles, we observe our children using materials related to experience-oriented education. The aim of experience-oriented education is to promote and observe the child's wellbeing and involvement. We believe that when a child is feeling good about himself, the environment and learning, he will develop better. Twice yearly each child, and every group, is observed for their wellbeing, involvement and competence.

At De Dukdalf, the teachers aim to see the whole child, and support and educate him/her in becoming an independent person who has the tools to learn and is able to make choices in life. We give a child 'handles' to know what to do in life and in education, even when it is hard to do the right thing. We are all responsible for each other, teachers and children, for the ambiance in our school. When there is an incident, we are not looking for a guilty party, instead we are trying to look for solutions; for the 'victim' as well as for the 'guilty' party.

Working in a Jenaplan school is different. It offers a different approach to teaching and working with parents and children. It is also very rewarding, especially when children are happy and come to school because they want to learn, play, talk and celebrate together. But there are still questions and dilemmas that you encounter. What critical questions can be asked about the Jenaplan and the approach?

What challenges does this education raise for teachers, children and parents?

What challenges does this raise for getting new teachers in the school and also for replacement teachers: what personal and professional qualities are required to shape and refine a teacher?

What are the implications for practice?

What if the board of the school focuses more on cognitive results than on well-being?

These questions and dilemmas are the challenges that the school is concerned with and benefits from. The team studies itself and we form a school where everyone is happy to come.

This has hopefully shown you a different way of looking at teaching children: that is not only about providing an education. It especially looks at how we find answers to questions together with the children, on what and how they want and need to learn. Every child is born with the will to learn and with the desire to ask questions. A teacher has to do the right thing at the right time, also in the eyes of a child.

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