

Jenaplan



Overview

Jenaplan is a teaching approach pioneered by **Peter Petersen** (1884 - 1952), professor at the Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena, Germany from 1923 until his death.

He was head of the Department of Education, which in 1924 became the “*Erziehungswissenschaftliche Anstalt der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, mit Versuchsschule zur Durchführung von Forschungsvorhaben und Erprobung neuer Formen des Schul- und Unterrichtslebens*” – the “pedagogical institute of the Friedrich-Schiller-University, with pilot school for the realization of research projects and the testing of new forms of school life and instruction”.

Petersen’s intention was the reform of the old-style educational system. His model centred around the concept of **community life**; he even named this model the *Lebensgemeinschaftsschule* (life community school). Rather than being an isolated institution, the school is rooted in the local community; **parents** are especially important in establishing these links.

Schools provide pupils with *Lebensraum* (living space) in which comfort and the arrangement of space are central so that “pupils find learning incentives each at their individual developmental levels that make possible a discovering and **action-oriented learning**” (ibid.). **The environment** changes according to the needs of the children, including those with Special Needs. Graffiti on desks or walls is not seen as vandalism; rather as a means of “creative expression” which could be channelled more productively elsewhere (ibid.). By involving pupils in the design of the room, it becomes a “social place” (ibid.).

As well as the focus on community life, central ideas of the Jenaplan educational concept include:

- **The Pedagogical Situation:** - allowing the pupils autonomy in their learning through self-discovery;
- **The Four Basic Education Forms:**
 - **conversation** – in a circle - ,
 - **play** – role plays and improvisations - ,
 - **work** – through self-instruction - and

- **party** – to build a sense of community;
- **the Rhythmic Weekly Work Schedule** – which “structures the week for the child” and disposes of traditional timetabled lessons so the child can work at their own rhythm and pace;
- **School Living Room and Materials** – providing differentiated materials and a stimulating environment, which breaks the formal hierarchy of teacher at the front, pupils at the back and
- **Characteristics instead of Marks** - as the idea of formal exams and academic competition is not compatible with Petersen’s ideas of community, verbal assessment takes the child’s overall development and personality into account.

The concept of “non-exclusion” – in today’s terminology, “**inclusion**”, of pupils with Special Educational Needs was a key feature of Petersen's original schools. This is reflected in the policies of today’s Jenaplan schools, which promote “cultural, religious and international understanding” as well as “inclusive education” (ibid.). There is strong evidence to suggest that Jenaplan does benefit those pupils with **Special Educational Needs**. The ETAI (Enhancing Teachers' Ability in Inclusion) project, a three year project “initiated by a team of academics and practitioners” (Eggertsdottir 2000) from four different countries – Austria, Iceland, Spain and Portugal – aimed to study successful classroom practices in order to develop support material for staff, in an “attempt to improve schooling for all children” (ibid.). Their case studies focused on classes including pupils with Special Needs, ranging from emotional and behavioural difficulties to Downs Syndrome and hearing impairments. In the Austrian case study, it was discovered that Jenaplan had been employed from the start as it promotes active learning and pupil autonomy, “elements which support [...] the inclusive approach” (ibid.).

Petersen’s methodology often comes under criticism because of the terminology he used. Words and concepts such as *Führer* (leader), *Volk* (people) and *Gemeinschaft* (community) have “negative connotations” in today’s society, inextricably linked as they are with National Socialism (ibid.). Petersen’s behaviour and attitudes at the time of the Third Reich also remain unclear (ibid.).