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## Teacher Training Models for the Jena Plan

Cuciureanu Monica\*

*Institute for Educational Sciences, 37 Stirbei Voda, Bucharest 010102, Romania*

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### Abstract

In Romania there are six alternative school models – Montessori, Freinet, Waldorf, Curative Pedagogy, Step by Step and Jena Plan – which are accepted by the Ministry of National Education and are regarded as school innovators. After graduating the initial training, teachers may follow different training programs to get specialized in alternative pedagogies. This article refers to the teacher training models for the Jena Plan, in a comparative manner: the Dutch and Romanian models are briefly described and analyzed, in order to highlight the strengths of each model. They can then be used for the improvement of the training programs for the Jena Plan.

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### 1. Pluralism in education

After a period of almost half a decade marked by the circulation of a single pedagogical model for evening and leveling individuals, the emergence of educational alternatives has generated a revolution in thought and sentence of many teachers and parents, given that it brought with it all the advantages (and truths!) of an option. The same transformations occurring in the collective mind of Romania after the disappearance of the single party and the emergence of political pluralism could also be identified through pluralism in education: we witnessed moments of joy, a concern for change, a particular commitment, the creativity and courage to implement new ideas. But we also witnessed moments of anxiety, confusion, search, because we had embarked on an unbeaten path, astonishing through its unique situations, the lack of markings, of labels, of strict regulations. Finally, in the reality

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\* Cuciureanu Monica. Tel.: +4-021-314-2783; fax: +4-021-312-1447.

E-mail address: [monica@ise.ro](mailto:monica@ise.ro)

shaping for the whole society, both parents and teachers have learned to manage the newly gained freedom of choice and, by virtue of the values they were standing for, chose those pedagogical models converging with their perspective of the world, life and education. Educational pluralism gained its meaning.

After 1989, several pedagogical models occurred and were developed in Romania, inspired by the reform pedagogy: Waldorf, Curative Pedagogy (derived from the first one), Montessori, Freinet, Jena Plan and Step by Step. All these models are child centered and emphasize the uniqueness of children. Henceforth derives the concern for an individualized educational process, in order to stimulate the maximum potential of each child, to respect his interests, his own working and learning rhythm, so as to value everyone regardless of his traits. The differences of emphases placed on each of these six educational alternatives and different methods aiming to develop and educate children provide parents with as many educational pathways to choose from.

In 1999, the Ministry of Education had the initiative to establish the National Commission for Educational Alternatives, which included representatives of the six educational alternatives acknowledged at a national level, such as specialized central and local inspectors. This commission manages the specific issues of educational alternatives and aims to their proper integration into the national education system. The fluctuations in terms of the development of educational alternatives in Romania were regularly caught: the first institutional assessment of alternative schools in Romania was organized in 2002 by the Ministry of Education and Research, and after nearly 10 years, the Institute for Educational Sciences concluded a research which observed the evolution of each educational alternative during the years 2001-2011 (Cuciureanu, 2011). Fluctuations are relevant for the Romanian educational system. In general, educational alternatives generated good practice models which influenced, to some extent, the national system, but also provided warnings for certain symptomatic problems of the system as a whole.

## 2. The Jena Plan

The Jena Plan was established internationally as an open pedagogical model, defined by the following features:

- emphasis on the direct experience of the child (experiential learning);
- emphasis on child development;
- emphasis on constructing the (cooperative) work and live community, where education occurs;
- emphasis on orientation within the environment, as a core of learning and of activities organized within the school;
- emphasis on developing the critical thinking of the community members;
- emphasis on values and on seeking for the meaning of existence.

“The Charta of Elementary School – Principles of the Jena Plan” (Both, Vreugdenhil, 1989) represents the document regulating at an international level the operation of this alternative school model. The first five points of the document refer to the manner in which the Jena Plan representatives see man in general. Another five points refer to the perspective on living and working within society, and the last ten refer to the organization and functioning of the Jena Plan schools.

In the Netherlands, the majority of schools organized according to the Jena Plan are primary schools for children between the ages of 4 and 10 (approximately 200 schools). During the 80’s preschool education was merged with primary school, and thus resulted the so called elementary school, (*basisschool*), the first step of mandatory education. The Jena Plan was introduced in several such schools, because it allowed for a different treatment of children, their organization into various types of groups, including core groups (age-heterogeneous groups or family-groups) comprising children of different ages. This grouping stimulates an easier adjustment to school life, a different type of learning – based on direct experience, learning from child to child, similar to learning in the family, but also learning mediated by an adult through pedagogical situations.

In Romania, the Jena Plan was especially developed for the preschool educational level. The heterogeneous age groups, promoted by this alternative, stimulated the social development and learning of children. Pre-school teachers were handed a greater freedom to respond to the development needs of each child than in the subsequent learning stages, and were able to individualize within the educational process by introducing the principles and specific activities of the Jena Plan in the rhythmic activity plan.

### 3. Teacher training for the Jena Plan

The training of teachers in each country is in accordance with a specific national model, but one observes at European level a tendency to standardize studies. Both in the Netherlands and in Romania, the Bologna model is followed, completing the basic training during the three undergraduate study years, followed by two years of specialization within the Masters Studies. The specialization provided by the Master study may also include educational alternatives.

Due to a more prolonged history and to a larger spreading of educational alternatives in the Netherlands than in Romania, the number of training institutions and, accordingly, the number of graduates is deemed to be considerably higher there than in Romania. The training for the Jena Plan is specific and it is constantly monitored by the organization managing this educational alternative at a national level, respectively the Dutch Jena Plan Association (Nederlandse Jena Plan Vereniging).

#### 3.1. The Netherlands

Teacher training for the Jena Plan is organized in the Netherlands by authorized professional higher education institutions (HBO). The authorization (license) to organize Jena Plan courses is granted by the Jena Plan Dutch Association (Nederlandse Jena Plan Vereniging) and is available for a period of two years. The study provides 8 credits (EC), and the diploma is acknowledged by the Ministry of Education (since 1988).

The initial training institutions may hold a “Jena Plan orientation” course which primarily aims to raise student awareness for the Jena Plan, increase enthusiasm for the principles of this educational alternative. The course has 2 EC (56 hours, which the training institutions are free to structure as they see fit), excluding the practice internships, meaning that the latter must amount to a minimum of 30 hours and may comprise of class assistance, portfolio work or team work etc.

In general, the curriculum for the “Jena Plan orientation” course includes the following features:

- Pedagogical bases for the Jena Plan;
- Establishing a challenging learning environment;
- The direction of organizing the educational process;
- The child and the others: group processes, forms of group organization;
- Basic activities for the Jena Plan: conversation, play, work, celebration and internal processing; standing in the rhythmic activity plan.

At this very stage, students are achieving an activity portfolio according to a typical set, where one can see their own alternative development. The study is completed by obtaining a Jena Plan certificate, which however, does not replace the Jena Plan diploma granted for specialization studies.

The Jena Plan diploma is obtained through post-graduate higher professional education studies (post-HBO), which last for two or three years, depending on the student’s initial training (if the student has completed the “Jena Plan orientation” course, the study period is shortened). The initial training may be observed in the portfolio compiled by the student, and this student development monitoring instrument is maintained during this specialization course. Practice is performed over 100 hours (excluding internships). The practice process is clearly regulated. Practice internships are concluded during primary education, in two schools organized according to the Jena Plan, in various age groups and amount to a minimum of 70 days. Students already working in a school organized according to the Jena Plan must perform at least one day of internship per year in another school, different from their own, also organized according to the Jena Plan. The internships must be correlated with research activities which the student must conclude for the final dissertation.

The institutions able to organize these specialization courses for the Jena Plan must be institutions accredited and authorized by the Jena Plan Dutch Association (Nederlandse Jena Plan Vereniging). The authorization criteria are clearly specified and aim, among others, to observe a common curriculum, at the existence of specialists to hold the course, and at complying with certain generally approved quality criteria.

### 3.2. Romania

The Institute of Education Sciences has supported the introduction of educational alternatives in the Romanian education system by periodically introducing research-development projects on this issue between conducted researches and by supporting the institutions of continuous teacher training in the country with experts in the field of alternative education.

Thus was designed and then implemented starting with 1994 a training program for teachers in preschool education who wanted to introduce the principles of the Jena Plan in the educational process. 2014 is in itself an anniversary year for the Jena Plan educational alternative: celebrating twenty years since the initial training activities for teachers interested in boosting the educational process, changing the methods of working with children in the sense of strengthening their own activity and responsibilities for education and human development were held. Our country was then visited by experts from Germany and the Netherlands, countries where the Jena Plan was already traditional, experts who reported on relevant professional experience, who supported and served as inspiration for the teachers in Romania.

The training course developed after completing the Jena Plan research projects was established modularly. This is a spiral course, where participants are granted an input of training information and experience, and then they are provided with a period of time to practically apply the principles learned and practiced in class. This period is not fixed, but flexible, in order to allow students to assimilate the training experiences and to face similar situation in the real didactic life at their own pace. The individualization of a training process is as important for the teachers as it is for the children. In fact, the whole manner of organizing and conducting the course considers the principles underlying the Jena Plan, aiming to familiarize teachers with a dynamic, interactive, personalized approach of the learning process.

The five modules cover the following features:

**Module I** regards the localization of the Jena Plan in the palette of educational alternatives in Romania in Europe; initiation in the principles of the Jena Plan educational alternative; development of the ability of teachers to rethink educational spaces available from the perspective of the Jena Plan principles.

Content of the first module covers:

- Peter Petersen and the context of the Jena Plan emergence;
- The general principles of the Jena Plan;
- The organization of an outdoor and indoor space for kindergartens/schools.

During the first module, the teachers develop the following skills:

- Critical thinking in terms of their own distance from innovation in the educational process;
- The ability to formulate their own educational ideal and to relate to the educational ideals of others;
- Acknowledging the general principles of the Jena Plan and the ability to relate thereto;
- The ability to set up indoor and outdoor educational areas suitable for the educational principles adopted.

**Module II** aims at initiating teachers in the organization and grouping of children depending on objectives set; activity organization by the rhythmical alternation of the four fundamental activities described in the Jena Plan: conversation, game, work and celebration; developing the ability of teachers to create pedagogical learning situations for children in the core group.

The contents of the second module are:

- Organizing and grouping children;
- Education and learning methods;
- Organizing activities.

During the second module, teachers develop the following skills:

- Knowledge of the principles for organizing and grouping children;
- The ability to pedagogically use the age differences between children, in the context of heterogeneous age groups in the core group;
- The ability to design their own structure for organizing children in relation to objectives and activities;
- Critical thinking regarding the application of methods in education and learning, according to the objectives sought.

**Module III** aims at identifying the main areas of interests for children and of the possible topics resulting therefrom; identifying the fundamental features of educational contents and observing them in the selection carried out; initiating teachers in the principles of *environmental orientation*, as an inter- and trans-disciplinary field, which allows children to adapt to the reality faced and to natural learning; the initiation in the principles of experiential knowledge and the practice thereof.

The contents of the third module refer to:

- Orientation in the environment;
- The contents of learning;
- Experiential learning.

During the third module, teachers develop the following skills:

- The ability to identify areas of interest to children and to negotiate the topics addressed;
- The ability to relate to the reality of children and to start therefrom in the educational process;
- Knowing the fundamental features of the educational contents and of *environmental orientation*;
- The proper selection of educational content, topics and working methods for *environmental orientation*;
- The initiation of pedagogical situations, based on experiential learning.

**Module IV** aims at initiating teachers in completing school documents; developing the ability of teachers to perform assessments of the educational process and to draft a subjective and objective report; supporting school autonomy and strengthening the educational community.

The contents of the fourth module are:

- Monitoring and assessment according to the Jena Plan;
- School documents and the completion thereof;
- School autonomy and the educational community;

During the fourth module, teachers develop the following skills:

- Critical and creative thinking on monitoring children and activities;
- The ability to perform children and activity monitoring;
- The ability to prepare the subjective and objective report according to the Jena Plan principles;
- Critical and creative thinking regarding school autonomy;
- Knowledge on the means to strengthen the educational community.

**Module V** aims to develop the ability of teachers to work in a network (both nationally and internationally) and to conclude educational partnership; to conceptually develop the Jena Plan; to develop the training and professional counseling system for the Jena Plan.

The contents of this module cover:

- The Jena Plan network and networking;
- The Jena Plan school and conceptual development;
- Professional training and counseling for the Jena Plan.

During the fifth module, teachers develop the following skills:

- The ability to work in a team and to organize professional networks;
- Creative thinking regarding school development;
- The ability to conceptually update the Jena Plan;
- Knowledge of the training system and professional counseling principles for the Jena Plan;
- The ability to initiate professional counseling within this educational alternative.

Each of the modules presented are concluded with workloads for teachers. These are practical activities done by the teachers either through the didactic activity carried out with children, or through the meetings with the parents or with other teachers. The respective activities and results obtained are recorded or registered and represent the Jena Plan activity portfolio, based on which the teachers may continue their alternative training.

According to the laws in force, teachers can initiate tenures and work in a Jena Plan group/class only by demonstrating their training for this educational alternative. If the modular course is not completed, teachers may work with a Jena Plan group subject to undergoing a training process and to have minimally completed the first two modules.

There is no initial training for the Jena Plan available in Romania. During university studies, the students are familiarized with the educational alternatives, but only at a general and theoretical level. Only recently has a concern emerged with the purpose of introducing Masters' studies for educational alternatives between the specializations provided. Thus Teacher Training Department of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences within the University of Bucharest has initiated an interdisciplinary Masters studies in 2013 entitled "Alternative pedagogies and theater arts in education". These are studies providing several educational alternatives designed to raise the awareness of students for the subsequent thoroughness of specialized studies in one of the educational alternatives provided. They do not compensate for the training offered by specialized organizations, responsible for managing each alternative at a national level

#### 4. Conclusions

One of the major changes in the Romanian school system in the past two decades is the development of pluralism in education. Parents may choose the school for their children not only taking into consideration the proximity to their home, the daily program or the foreign languages studied in school. They can also choose the school model according to the promoted values and the educational ideals. When the family's and the school's values are convergent, the adopted strategies and methods are mutually accepted and consequently followed. A good communication and cooperation between school and family has a direct impact on the educational process and on its results.

Teachers may also choose for a certain school-model, according to their values and vision upon education. In order to introduce an alternative model in school, it is necessary to have a special training for it, the sustainment of the parents and the acceptance of the school-team and school administration on local level. Mainly continuous teacher training programs and in-service training provide teachers with the necessary skills for the Jena Plan. In the Netherlands the initial training can give an orientation for the Jena Plan, too.

In the Netherlands the model Jena Plan is mainly used in "basisscholen" (for children aged 4 to 10), while in Romania it is used in kindergartens (for children aged 3 to 6). The teacher training starts in the Netherlands with initial training and is deepened by continuous training. Both kinds of programs are strongly sustained by practical activities.

In Romania teachers follow a spiral-shaped continuous training program, which combines theory with practical work. During five modules participants are not only introduced in the principles and theory of the Jena Plan, but they also get practical insights through the way this program is organized. The combination of different level groups allows the teachers to experience the individualization in the educational process and prepares them for the mixed groups of children, promoted by this alternative school model. Important activities during the training courses are communication, "active learning", reflexion and self-evaluation. The similarities and differences between the participants are used in a pedagogical manner, in order to enhance the efficiency of learning and their level of satisfaction. Participants are then encouraged to introduce progressively the new method into their everyday activity in class and to develop a critical and creative attitude towards it.

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