

place in certain settings, but it is not as widely applicable as the authors would wish it to be. I am still left wondering how this book came to be published in 1986.

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Lernen durch die Hintertür. Neue Lernformen in der Lebensspanne

Charles A. Wedemeyer (Trans. by Karlheinz Rebel)
Weinheim/Basel: Verlag Beltz, 1984, 268 pages

In 1984, Karlheinz Rebel published a translated and revised edition of Charles A. Wedemeyer's book *Learning at the Backdoor, Reflections on the Non-Traditional Learning in the Lifespan* (1981). The goal of the German edition was to provide the interested German readership with an overview of the state of development and research in non-traditional learning in the United States of America.

In his introduction—which was much more difficult to read than the translation itself—Rebel discusses the problem of comparative studies in education. The main difficulty for these studies is that different connotations exist in different languages. In a way, the text under discussion is itself a demonstration of this problem: in some instances Rebel gives strictly literal translations which are not commonly used in German. For instance, the term “university extension” is translated as “Universitätsausdehnungsbewegung,” a word which suggests an increase in the number of universities rather than a branching out into non-traditional forms of teaching and learning. For this reason, it is especially helpful that the author provides a detailed index and includes the original English terminology in brackets after the German terms. The index would be easier to work with, though, if it had been separated into a subject index and an author index.

In his book, Wedemeyer gives a description of the diverse possibilities of non-traditional learning, mainly in distance education. Learning is not just restricted to the time of school or university education, learning takes place throughout life (“learning in the lifespan”), although with different aims and methods. Far more teaching and learning takes place outside than inside the classrooms.

Most of Wedemeyer's reflections, and the objections against them, are also well-known to a German reader. It seems that the problem of non-traditional learning is a worldwide one, always facing the question of equality, acceptance, openness of access, certificates, and so forth. As Wedemeyer correctly says, the only important question is “what have you learnt?” not “where, how, in which sequence, in which institution, or in which time have you learnt it?”

The situation in the Federal Republic of Germany is similar to that in North America. Here too, the traditional institutions of higher education feel that non-traditional institutions are a disturbance and a threat. This leads them to publicize

the opinion that this type of education has a lower prestige. In contrast to North America, formal degrees have a very high status in the Federal Republic of Germany; thus it is much more difficult to recognize non-traditional open learning. It is also true that most of distance teaching institutions in Germany—especially at the university level—aim to be as traditional as the conventional institutions, or even a bit more traditional because everything is so “transparent” for everybody.

In his structural model on non-traditional learning, Wedemeyer says that a successful final exam is not the real aim. After finishing a definite learning project, learning starts again. Thus, the institution should not lose touch with successful learners nor with those learners who have redeveloped their role behaviour during the learning process. If an institution remains too close to the learner, there is the risk that the learner will feel the institution controls him/her too much. It must be possible for a learner to say without a bad conscience “I want a break from learning!”

This is an important book, and I hope it will have a large circulation among people in the German-speaking world who are decision-makers in the fields of distance education and non-traditional learning. Maybe some of Wedemeyer's ideas will provide the necessary stimulus to revise traditional points of view about non-traditional learning.

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- Rumble, Grenville. 1986. *Planning and Management of Distance Education*. Croom Helm: Beckenham, Kent.
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