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## Adult Education in the German 'Medienverbund'

### Abstract

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# Adult Education in the German 'Medienverbund'

Karin Kristiansson

**L**EGASTHENIE is the German word for dyslexia.

Last year, some 15,000 teachers and parents in southern Germany learned how to recognize and deal with this very common reading handicap among children. Instead of going to formal classes, they enrolled in a mass media course, coordinated by the German Institute for Distant Studies, at the University of Tübingen.

The course, running over a period of 6 to 8 months, included five study guides, 25 radio programs, and six television shows. The participants also attended discussion groups and seminars at their local schools or adult education centers. Standard tests were given to those who took the course for credit.

The legasthenic programs took two years in the making. The proceedings were complex and time consuming, but the results seem to justify the efforts. Researchers, writers, and administrators at the Institute worked with subject matter specialists, educators, radio and television producers, and publishers. To make matters even more complicated, all material had to be approved by the education departments of the participating states (or *Bundesländer*).

This mass media effort was a prime example of adult education in the so-called German *Medienverbund*, a concept which was developed by the Institute.

Founded in 1967, the Institute employs a staff of about 430 professionals, some directly connected with the University of Tübingen, others working in education, publications, radio, and television. During the past six years, close to 185,000 people

completed one or several home study courses offered by the Institute, ranging from mathematics, religion, and chemistry to social behavior, dyslexia, and foreign languages. Teachers as well as the general public enrolled in the study programs.

The Director of the Institute, Dr. Günther Dohmen, professor of education at Tübingen University, is an early spokesman for the Medienverbund in adult education.

“The Institute has three major responsibilities,” he explains.

1. To develop home study courses for teachers and the general adult population.
2. To serve as a communications research center.
3. To train communications leaders.

“In all three areas we work with the Medienverbund. We use all the mass media techniques in our own courses. We cooperate with mass media, listing courses and lectures offered on radio and television. We combine television and radio courses with our own study material. We support the adult education centers and offer some of our study material in their evening courses. We train communicators and help community leaders and resource persons set up local programs. We conduct a number of research projects to evaluate program impact and analyze our audience.

“It’s important to use mass media in all adult education,” Dohmen continues, “but it is just as important to understand their potentials and limitations. Television, for instance, can never replace the classroom teacher or the discussion leader. Radio often offers more depth of subject matter than television. The printed material is, of course, a necessity in any home study course. Local discussion groups and seminars help students and also break their isolation. Thus, our writers, researchers, and specialists draw from all resources in the Medienverbund to develop educational material that fits the motto: ‘The school comes to your home through the *Medienverbund*.’ ”

Locally, the German adults look to radio, television, and their adult education centers for information and cultural enrichment.

Since 1967, the four southern states, or *Bundesländer*, have been offering the so-called Telekolleg programs, providing in-

school programs, teacher training courses, and also a two-year study course leading to high school equivalency certificates.

The programs are telecast in the early evening. Textbooks are divided into lessons with tests and reviews. Once a month, or more often, the students meet at a local high school or education center to discuss problems and check progress. Telekolleg is patterned much after the British Open University, although on a smaller scale, and with budget problems. It has, however, already become the backbone of the educational television programs in southwestern Germany, with a large number of participants. During 1969-73, more than 30,000 students from all walks of life enrolled for the two-year program. Close to 9,000 students passed the final examinations and received their diplomas.

Besides the Telekolleg, German television offers a number of program series, some produced locally, others aired over the national network, which is composed of nine cooperating stations—one in each of eight Bundesländer, and one in Free Berlin.

Many of the adult education centers use the television programs in their courses. The larger centers have video recording units, so that programs can be taped and stored on cassettes for future use. There are some 1,100 adult education centers in the Federal Republic of Germany, reaching about seven million people yearly with courses, workshops, study circles, and lectures. Again, the Medienverbund is at work.

Thus a student can

- enroll in a television or radio course for home study.
- study the same subject at the local adult education center. The course leader uses all or parts of the television programs as a basis for lectures and discussions.
- study a television course at the center, using video recordings of the programs. Here he joins a group of students who meet informally without discussion leader or expert. The group decides on the pace of study and handling of the material.
- take a self-study course at the center. Films, slides, audio and video cassettes are available. The course is structured for individual learning. The student proceeds at his own

pace and plans the study hours to fit his schedule. A resource person is available for individual conferences.

- take a training course in communications, leadership, and self development at the center. A professional communicator leads the course. Training aids, such as audio and video cassettes, films, slides, and closed-circuit television are used.

Here are a few examples of this type of coordination in the Medienverbund.

In the fall of 1974, the television network presented a series on child development. The adult education center in Tuttlingen (on the Danube) taped the discussions on video cassettes and offered a course on child psychology in the spring of 1975. A local child psychologist conducted the course and used the video cassettes as a basis for discussion. The participants liked the technique, as they felt that the video portion gave them a chance to compare notes with some of the nation's top experts.

The same center offered a course on consumer education and money management. The first meeting was tied in with a live television production where consumers aired their grievances and discussed problems. At the conclusion of the television program, local consumer experts and business representatives continued the discussion at the center.

During the winter of 1974-75, a weekly course on speed reading was aired over the television network. The adult education center in Sindelfingen (outside Stuttgart) taped the programs and offered them free to students who were interested in getting together to form an independent study group.

The director of the center met with the group and helped them set up goals and guidelines, and showed them how to use the video playback unit. From there on, the students were on their own.

An evaluation showed that this group had difficulties agreeing on how fast they should proceed. They had problems with the video cassettes, and in some cases the recording was poor. However, a definite plus was the fact that many watched the programs at home and did not understand all so at the center they repeated

the program, and in some cases ran sections two or three times. Enough motivation was there for them to complete the unit.

At the adult education center in Wuppertal (north of Cologne), a new AV center offers students group study, as well as individual work. Many of the Telekolleg courses are available on video cassettes. A student, who, for instance, wants to take a course in economics, checks in at the library, receives his study card, textbooks, and instruction how to use the video playback machine. Then he sets up his own study schedule. If he has problems, he confers with a resource person at the center or at one of the local high schools.

A brand new program series is ready to go this fall in the Medienverbund. The program series, *Reden und Reden Lassen*—to talk and let others talk—is produced by Südwestfunk television in Baden-Baden. It includes 13 half-hour television programs, a textbook on communications, and courses at some of the adult education centers. Thus, the students can view the programs at home, study the textbook, and join the local discussion group.

Previews of the television programs promise that there is a lot of fun in store for the viewers. Instead of the traditional lecture-type and film-slide-graph presentation, the programs are produced in the American soap opera style, with professional actors. No summaries or scientific elaboration will be included in the television shows. Instead, each family situation speaks for itself. The textbook supplements the television program with in-depth analysis. The local discussion groups should have plenty of material for discussion and learning.

*Reden und Reden Lassen* will be pretested during the summer at a select number of adult education centers. This is the first time that the centers have been directly involved in the planning of a major television production.

Director of adult education in Tuttingen, Walter Sieg, comments:

“In the past, the centers have taken what is available from educational television. For the *Reden und Reden Lassen* series, we have had the opportunity to discuss program content, and suggest revisions of the textbook. This summer, we will be pretesting the

programs, using video cassettes, with a group of about 20 adults. We expect a large number of students for the course, scheduled this fall, in conjunction with the television series. Our pretest results will be very valuable, not only to our center, but to others planning the same adult education telecourse.”

Training is needed for leaders and teachers, using television recordings and live programs as a teaching tool. Realizing this need, the German Association of Adult Education, through the Adolf Grimme Institute in Marl, Westfalen, recently published a guide, *Soziales Lernen im Medienverbund*. The book lists television programs on family relations and child development presented during the fall and winter of 1974-75. A summary of each program is included, with suggestions how these television discussions can be used in a local course. The book also contains an extensive bibliography, suggested news releases for the local press announcing the course, and questionnaires for students and course leaders evaluating the overall program.

German communicators, like extension workers in the U.S., talk about a coordination of AV material, and something is being done about it. The Institute for Distant Studies in Tübingen is setting up a computerized AV center, where films, tapes, slides, and printed material will be available to students and teachers. The center could eventually become the headquarters for all Germany, and even Europe, but the problems are many.

“We are already cooperating with a number of countries in Western Europe,” explains Dohmen, “and once more hardware is available, and more software produced, the possibilities are almost unlimited. The task however, is gigantic. All our material, produced at the Institute, must be approved by all eleven Bundesländer (eight geographical and political units, plus Bremen, Hamburg, and Free Berlin). The Institute depends on appropriations from all eleven Länder, and our money is funded yearly. Also, the television systems for closed circuit are many, and not all compatible. And, of course, the European systems are not compatible with the American. Many of us look forward to the electronic *Bildplatte*—or videodisc—where, through laser beams—it will be possible to store thousands of slides on one single disc, or a whole series of



programs. The system now developed by Phillips will be on the market in two years. The playback units will be inexpensive and within reach of the average household. Once this system is on the market, the Medienverbund can open new communications channels for educators, students, and the home.”

Although cable is a long way in coming, the average German housefrau is ready to give her blessing to it, after she realizes that this will make it possible for her to tune in the latest prices on wienerschnitzel, look at specials in the stores, order the family vacation tickets, and confer with local traffic offices concerning the traffic situation on the Autobahn. Cable, however, is dragging its feet, partly because of cost, partly because of opposition from various quarters—the almighty Post Office, television stations, and government. Many see in cable television a potential threat to the well-regulated national and local television programs, and their advertising revenues. (In German television, advertising is done in 30-minute blocks twice a day.) Cable television, with no control of program contents could also be a powerful political tool.