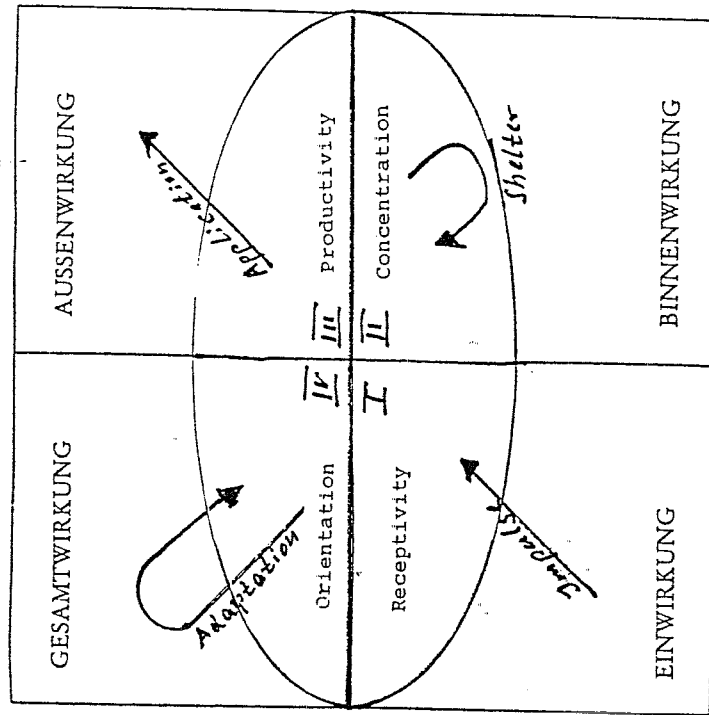


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PROGRAMMES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS: PAVING THE WAY INTO UNIVERSITY



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In my report I want to give you some informations on how German adult education programmes for senior citizens are organized "to pave the way" from outside into the classrooms of the universities.

(1) I shall start with some hints on the institutional framework of German extra-mural work.

(2) Then I'll refer to some aspects why older people are becoming of a growing importance to theory and practice of adult education.

(3) I want to offer a frame of reference to distinguish between four functions of learning. This might be helpful to differentiate between those modes of learning, that are of special interest for older people finding their way to the lectures and seminars:

(4) - referring to these functions - examples of different German University programmes for Senior citizens will be given, closing at last with the activities at the Freie Universität Berlin.

1. The institutional framework

Comparing British and German extra-mural activities it is important to consider that in Germany the right to enroll in university diploma-courses or even in academic certificate courses is strictly restricted to those who have a general university entrance qualification (Allgemeine Hochschulreife), and this you get from school. Universities have no right to open their regular courses for a wider range of persons, e.g. with vocational qualifications. It is only the school administration that controls the way into the universities.

In consequence extra-mural adult-education programmes are not allowed to provide university-diploma or university-certificate courses. Because of those legal and institutional restrictions the contribution of German universities to their regional adult education system follows roughly spoken four organizational patterns, which are

(1) Extra-mural classes in cooperation with adult education institutions. These classes which are integrated into the programmes of the Volkshochschulen are called in Berlin "FU-Kurse". They provide courses on all subjects of general interest outside the university, provided that teachers can be found at the Freie Universität. These courses are part of a "liberal education concept"; they are primarily non-vocational and without any certificate.

(2) In cooperation with several institutions, interestgroups or social initiatives we organize courses, seminars or projects that are focussed on special interests, needs, problems or learning styles of target groups.
(For example: Anglo-German-Seminar, International Summer School, vocational training for adult educators, members of helping professions, courses for self-help-groups.)

(3) The comeback of a traditional organizational pattern can be seen in the right of everybody to join regular university lectures or seminars as a guest-student. In this form of study you are allowed to attend a certain lecture without any formal restriction, if there is enough room available, paying only a low fee. But this is an additional service only, it depends on the personal agreement of the professor and offers no right to examinations.

(4) Last but not least there are a lot of university lectures, which are open to everybody and though they mostly refer to subjects of general interest they usually are on a high scientific level. In a town like Berlin with three universities and a lot of academies and colleges there are much more open lectures than we know of.

One of our main concerns in our tiny department of adult education is to consider how these different organizational patterns may be used for different and changing learning interests and needs, that can be found here and now in the city of Berlin.

This brings me to my next point:

2. The rising importance of "ageing" for adult education

Older and retired people as students in our adult education classes always have been an important group but more from a statistical point of view than as a factor for educational planning. Older or "ageing" people as a target group, that demand special considerations with regard to subject, method and organizational setting are a new perspective with far reaching consequences. Older people have become "target groups" of a growing public interest because of the following factors:

- The demographic structure of the German society is changing: in the coming decades the relation between younger and older people will be dramatically shifting to the expanding groups of people older than sixty.
- Because of this social change the third part of life will become in our society much more differentiated and complex than ever before. We already find an impressive number of "avantgardistic life-perspectives" held by sixty year old women, who prepare for a new start into the following twenty years - that is about a quarter of their whole life-span. Not the time to stand aside!
- This extraordinary situation is also influenced by the fact that more and more people retire or must retire very early (on the average at 57,8), so that you find a rising number of adult learners in their fifties looking for a new start after retirement.
- Finally the effects of unemployment: as you know older people have a bad chance for reemployment as soon as they lose their

Jobs - and here they are: a growing group in the middle of their life - full of fears, hopes and unfulfilled expectations - but without greater economic problems.

- Furthermore there is the group of middle aged women at the end of their forties - more or less free from childcaring and family work. Confronted with an "empty-nest-syndrom" they look for a chance to overcome social isolation, to give their lives a new direction and to find a paid or unpaid occupation that makes sense.

In all these examples we may notice that the traditional form of structuring our life-spans is melting away. We are more and more confronted with a complex differentiation of individual life-courses and life-styles; especially in that time which seems to be a new period: the time between work and retirement (ZWAR Projekt Dortmund). People are too old to be reemployed but too young to hang around. In adult education classes you can meet more and more "young oldies" that are not willing to retire: they only feel forced to change the direction of their activities. This changing of direction seems to become a very precarious life event and is a very important challenge for adult education.

Not only the adult educators but also the public social services are confronted with a new generation of old citizens and with new behaviour patterns: Some of the most characteristic words these days begin with the pre-fix "self". Words like "self-help-groups", "self-organization" or "self-determination" are semantic signals of changed demands and expectations of life. Everybody seems responsible for his life: "it's your life that you live". Sociological research confirms the trend to an "individualisation of life-span". That means that we are more and more free to choose our own way of life - a life course that is very little regulated and secured by traditional patterns and models. More and more people therefore seem to be under stress to invent their personal life patterns - sometimes it seems that they have lost future because of lack of

anticipation. But this constraint "to live your own life" is growing into a new social pattern that deserves reflection. Without reflexive learning the freedom of choice becomes a loss of orientation.

In this situation education and learning - in the sense of helpful, personally significant and living learning - is what a rising number of ageing people need and what they are looking for. Here the question arises how the traditional educational institutions and the adult educators are prepared to meet this complex and universal learning demand.

"Learning" as a personal answer to a critical and stressful life-event has to be seen in close relationship with the following factors:

- with the need for new information and especially for new orientation-patterns: to learn what there might be to learn - to seek what is worth finding
- with a meaningful interpretation of one's own person, life and reference groups, the understanding of frustration, satisfaction and perspectives of one's future and past
- with problems of physical and mental health. Education for older people is closely linked with their vitality and is more and more regarded as an important factor in public health programmes
- with new forms of personal and social activities - to open new dimensions and fields for past retirement occupation
- with new forms of political activities, by which the situation of older people will be discussed in public and may be improved.

In view of this complex and open situation Adult Education has to avoid simple instrumental ways and answers. For example, "preparation for retirement" is a far reaching holistic aim and should not be organized in special qualification courses for target groups. The problem is, that we don't know what retirement really means, mostly this word is only a concept from outside and remains very open to how the persons concerned interpret it in different situations of their life.

Adult Education in the context of life-span-orientated-learning therefore has on the contrary to be open for the changing self-descriptions and self-interpretations of different target-groups. Education has to help adult learners to organize their personally meaningful learning in close relationship with the way they experience their situation. Beyond that Adult Education has to provide settings in which these self-interpretations of actual situations in the life-span may be reflected and discussed.

Here we have reached the point where we have to ask what the different extra-mural activities can contribute to this complex and challenging educational problem considering which specific function may be undertaken by universities. This is a question that a rising number of German Universities in East and West is trying to answer in different ways.

To give a better understanding and a systematic survey of those different approaches, I would like to offer first a frame of reference in which these University Programmes for Senior Citizens can be compared. In the following I shall separate four functions of life-span-orientated learning:

3. Four Functions of Life-span-orientated Learning

These four functions derive from the fact that a human being is an autonomous learning organism that lives in a productive interchange with its specific natural, social and cultural environment. Concerning this environmental interchange four different directions might be distinguished:

I. Receptivity

The motion from outside to inside: Learning means the capability of reception. It refers to the question to what degree a person may be open for stimulation, is perceptive to new impulses, ready for discovering-learning, is flexible to build new patterns of perception and active enough to find new horizons or strange outside worlds.

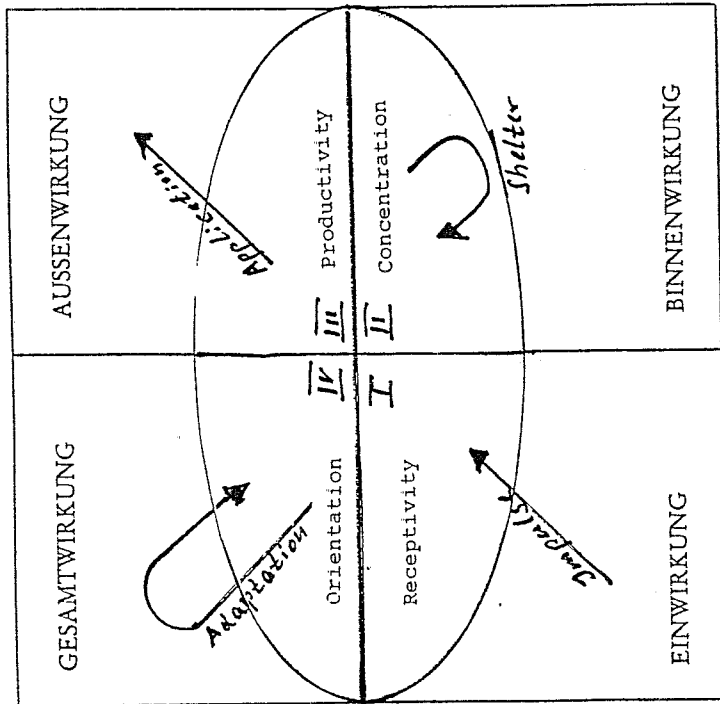
- concentration on the learning person in the sense of self-knowledge (i.g. biographical learning) or experiential knowledge.
- concentration on a special topic or on the integration of different subjects by an organizing principle or point of view.
- support for a high intensity of learning which gives the possibility of being absorbed by specialized studies on a deeper level.

Adults who all their life had to behave functionally meeting external needs and demands very often are looking forward to be free to look after their own long neglected interests and hunger for learning. Besides there is a large number of women who think that they have neglected their personal interests long enough and who now are very keen on learning more and intensely about being a woman. Another group of adult learners think that it is very attractive to become an amateur-expert in a special field of interest. Passionately and earnestly they dedicate themselves to their study.

III. Social Productivity

The third quadrant symbolizes a classical understanding of learning. It is based on an interchange with the environment that tends towards output and productivity. Learning here is closely geared to utilization and to practical application and is primarily meant to qualify persons for special situations, problems or duties in every day life.

Very often it is maintained that this is the mode of learning which is most adequate to adults and indeed, when asked many people seem to be keen on useful and applicable learning. But we have to consider that other than utilitarian modes of learning are often not very clear in the mind or seem to be illegitimate forms. For example "receptive learning" or learning for its own sake mostly are looked at as "dirty words".



For adults this is a fascinating but often threatening dimension of learning. Adults have to break through the shells of hardened experiences and common sense views to be able to regain reality. This is especially important for critical-life-events when familiar explanations of the world cease to work. Learning to open again for the new and the unexpected means very often a regression to earlier stages of personal development. Therefore the learners need an organized setting to feel secure enough to leave the wellknown tracks.

II. Concentration on Personal Growth

The second quadrant shows a motion against the environment, returning and focussing the inside world of a learning organism. This mode of learning needs to be screened from disturbing external influences and demands. This mode is characterized by

On the other hand learning how to acquire qualifications is a very attractive und satisfying form to study, if a person knows why and for what purpose he is attending University Courses. An important advantage lies in the chance for a clear structuring of goals, subjects, time and attainable results. It is this structured learning that many older people prefer and are looking for.

IV. Orientation

The last quadrant denotes the comprehensive function in the interchange between learning system and its environment: it describes the relation between the organism and the natural, social and cultural "universe" of which it is a part. Learning in this context means adaptation to the all embracing world as an intelligible and meaningful world. It therefore concerns primarily the integration of different and often divergent patterns of meaning; you can also describe it as a search for "orientation" in the old religious sense of "world construction". This mode of learning is often looked upon as very specific for the old - it tends towards what Germans are calling "Bildung" and what is not far from the desire for wisdom.

4. German University Programmes for Senior Citizens

Referring to the four modes of learning we are able to give a short survey of the various approaches which we find at present at German universities. Most of them are an organizational structuring of the possibilities available to guest students - sometimes they are enrolled as regular students without the right to set for academic exams.

I. Receptive Capability

In a wide range of German universities like Frankfurt, Marburg, Trier, Bielefeld, Hannover, Oldenburg, and Freie Universität Berlin there is a clear focus on the fact that Universities may serve as an enormous resource of stimulating impulses for people who have enough time and are interested in becoming acquainted with a strange and fascinating scientific subculture. From this point of view it is not only the interest in the subjects of the lectures but first of all an interest in academic life in general. Very often Universities as a whole seem attractive enough to have an inviting effect to those who are ready to discover new horizons. The organizational forms consist in information sheets and brochures, in counselling offices and in periodical meetings, especially at the beginning of a term.

In some of the university towns groups of mature students have set up these offices for information and counsel autonomously, but always in close contact with the university administration. A more intensive approach to this learning dimension can be found in special forms of group-work, seminars and summer-schools which are organized for particular learning interests and target groups. For example in Berlin every year mature students organize a "Sommer-Universität für ältere Erwachsene" that under various topics covers different fields of research and scientific activities in our township and helps the mature students to come into personal contact with scientists and their institutions.

Considering a university as a complex "learning environment" the process of getting into contact and growing familiar with its every-day-life constitutes a learning effort by itself. Those "socialisation effects" have a comprehensive learning effect when there is the opportunity to prepare, to accompany and to reflect the studies. In this sort of groupwork we university-people come into close contact with the different problems of older persons in order to change their common-sense-patterns and to make them accept new experiences as really new ones.

At the moment, however, at most of the German universities the

information and counselling groups very seldom have a clear focus on these learning effects - very often they work in a rather technical manner.

II. Concentration and Personal Growth in a Sheltered Context

At several universities, like e.g. Oldenburg, there are programmes for women who are trying to find a chance for a new start or who wish to regain paid employment. These courses with a focus on the situation of female problemgroups are the result of a broad discussion inside and outside of the university. They correspond with feminist activities of female professors, students and politicians. In this respect universities hold a big stock of learning resources that is waiting to be used.

Another step into the direction of a "subject orientated-study" is to be seen in a form of counselling I am experimenting with. At the beginning of each "Semester" (academic year) I am discussing with guest students those lectures or seminars selected from the regular university syllabus which might be of personal relevance to them.

Discussing, evaluating and selecting relevant topics seems to include a higher learning effect. The subjective learning interests will become more reflexive and the logic of selecting may improve step by step. In the middle and at the end of the term we usually meet again und re-evaluate the decisions by talking about their learning experiences, problems or frustrations.

But these groups are only a beginning. We still have to face the problem that a personal structuring on the basis of guest student studies is too difficult for most of the students, with little learning experience at a university. (I'll come back to this point when I'll talk about our new counselling programme.) On the other hand there is a host of quite individualistic senior students who do not like social group work and who are happy to find their way alone. Those people don't need support after they found their niche in one of the instit-

utes where they may become a sort of amateur scientist.

III. Applicative or purposeful Learning and social Productivity

When you talk about university for senior citizens, sooner or later you are asked about the "purpose" and this means very often that you are asked about the possible social effects of this investment. Also the management of a university is very keen on economic reasons and effects as a justification of study courses. Especially when most of your students are persons who have just been sifted out of economic life or who are preparing for retirement, those effects can hardly be promised.

Nevertheless you can find quite a number of very creative and interesting university projects which try to give older or middleaged persons useful qualifications for socially valuable activities and duties. Most of these projects are well structured, with defined entrance qualifications, mostly of a two years duration, a time-table with a given curriculum. Most of them end with an examination, based on the guest-student status.

Let us give some examples:

- Berliner Modell: Ausbildung für nachberufliche Arbeitsbereiche (BANA)

At the Technical University Berlin there is a programme which gives qualifications for occupations after retirement:

- Counsellor for environmental problems
- Counsellor for nutrition, disposal and consumption
- Counsellor for industrial relations with their social regional environment
- Counsellor for Community Communication

The idea is to combine vocational experience of older people with new qualifications which you may get at a technical university.

- Zwischen Arbeit und Alter (ZWAR)

At Dortmund university there are several projects to qualify or support older people for volunteering in social fields or

to build up selforganized social group work, hobby groups or leisure activities. These projects are in close connection with workers' educational associations or workers' cultural activities in the Ruhr-area.

- Volontär in der Gerontologischen Forschung

At the Freie Universität you can find a project "Volonteeering in Gerontological Research", in which older people are introduced to and trained in modern social research aims and measures. It is intended to enable the mature students to assist the researcher by contacting old interview-partners and evaluating their social background.

Furthermore we organize several small cooperation-projects with groups or institutions of older volunteers of with interestgroups of old people. In all these cases experts from the University are training and counselling them as a practical measure to define and to meet their special objectives more effectively.

IV. Orientational Learning

In our time scientific knowledge still remains the most legitimate way to interpret the world and our lives. The University is full of very stimulating suggestions about how to reconstruct our broken universe of meanings. There are a lot of people who are keen on general orientation and are interested in comparing different ways which can answer their questions. If you are a seeker for the different meanings of modern life, society or culture, you may find the springs are still bubbling in the German Universities. It is not surprising to find mature students with this kind of interest in every university programme. Some universities, however, - especially in smaller towns like Bamberg or Marburg - have devoted a part of their programmes to this concern. These programmes consist on the one hand of special information brochures that highlight lectures or classes on interesting topics. On the other hand there are special lectures or seminars for mature students which reflect their subject from the perspective of the old. Very often

you find a combination of religious, philosophical, sociological and anthropological topics.

In these seminars you very seldom find young people - because the programmes are not part of the regular study courses.

At the end of my survey I would like to give you a rough idea of our actual activities and plans.

As a result of various experiences in the past years it may be stated that most of the German university programmes are focussed especially on the first and the third mode of learning, that is on receptivity and on productivity. When we consider this as an organisational decision it is not surprising. In both learning modes there is a structurally fixed point, which you can use for curricular planning:

- Receptivity as a learning mode uses concrete and special resources of the academic life or interesting persons and subjects and institutes as a starting point for planning and organization.

- Productivity as a learning dimension finds its organizing principle in analyzing external situations, which require special qualifications which may be acquired at a university.

Both planning principles are based on empirical facts in contrast to the quadrant II and IV which are based much more on the subjective interpretation of the learners.

But Receptivity and Productivity are only working if the social structure and the learning interests are recognizable and not too ambiguous. If the complexity grows too high, planning has to combine huge efforts with low effects. This is very often the situation we have to face in adult education, especially if life-span-orientated. Most of the above mentioned special programmes or courses are too narrow and too specific to be suitable for a wider range of learning interests and personal demands.

Therefore we are now convinced that we have to return to the two most important principles of adult education, which are

- the individual planning of the student's own learning

(didaktische Selbstwahl)

and

- Open curricula, which means flexibility of all regulations. Organization of adult learning must not be based on fixed curricula but on the contrary has to support the individual learner to acquire that part of knowledge or competence he or she is ready to integrate and is personally interested in.

In this individualistic perspective the formal framework of the traditional university with its regulations and regulations which are not relevant to senior students is breaking down. The university comes to be seen as a complex network of numerous lectures, seminars and scientific groupings. The basic element of a university is a social event: the lecture or the class held by a professor. From this point of view the legal status of a guest-student is very important and has many advantages in comparison with that of undergraduates who have to follow external objectives and are regimented by schedules.

What we now try to find is an organizational structure for guest students that provides support by experts and which is so transparent that it may give orientation and security at the beginning but is also flexible enough to allow the (mature) students to follow their own changing learning objectives.

It is this model of organizational structuring that we have in mind when developing what we call "Guidance Programme for Guest Students".

It consists of two parts:

1. Information and Orientation

The programme contains for example

- information meetings, personal advising, counselling-groups, contact-meetings, excursions into institutes of the University and lectures that stimulate new subjects.

2. Study Guidance Groups (Studienbegleitzirkel)

Study guidance groups have to knit together all those classes or lectures that are of specific interest for the actual learning process of a student. At the moment they refer to the list of classes of the Freie Universität but this may be extend-

ed to all other classes, public lectures and learning events as far as they are known, available and adequate to the student.

Study Guidance Groups are working together several semesters under the counselling of a competent expert, who knows the University as well as the adult education classes.

Study Guidance groups have to serve the following demands:

- they introduce into scientific knowledge, topics, methods and literature
- they inform about lectures or seminars which are of special interest for the topic, the problem or the subject of the study circle
- they organize the formulation of learning interests, personal learning objectives and the selection of adequate lectures and classes inside and outside the university
- the tutor of the study guidance groups gives advice and helps with questions and problems a guest student has to face
- if needed the study circle may use exercises
- in general these groups may become a "social security system", where the mature students feel at home and meet other persons with similar interests and feelings.

We now start with five study guidance groups with the following topics:

1. Techniques and methods of scientific work
2. Conflicts between the generations. Interpretations about the relationship between the generations from historical, sociological and educational point of view.
3. Health, Disease and Society. Interpretations and topics from sociology of medical science.
4. Approaches to Psychology. Psychological interpretations about family, profession and leisure time.
5. Biological Foundations of Ecology.

In future there will be also study guidance groups which are organized for targetgroups. I am sure that this structuring is flexibel enough for various learning goals and interests which we meet with all the different people who come to us.