

Adelaide / Australien

Zeitungskolleg
**A new way in open adult education
in West Germany**

Jost Reischmann

The development of a 'newspaper college' by the Deutsches Institut für Fernstudien an der Universität Tübingen on the model of Courses by Newspaper of University Extension of the University of California at San Diego is described. The German experience in providing distance education through newspapers is analyzed.

What we had

The aim of the German Institute for Distance Studies (DIFF), founded in 1967, is to examine and to realize possibilities for academic study in which the continual presence of the student is unnecessary. The main tasks of the Institute are the development, testing and implementation of academic and 'distance courses' in various subjects. In particular, the Institute promotes academic learning and in-service subject training for teachers.

About forty-five courses for teachers, each consisting of a series of 'study-letters' (brochures of about 100 pages), have been developed and are used by about 120,000 readers. Topics ranged from present-day English and mathematics for chemistry students to thermodynamics and career education.

DIFF is also running a pilot project on multi-media distance study for first degree studies at universities. This programme is being tested at ten German universities.

A widespread audience is involved in our *Funkkolleg*, or 'Radio-College'. Every year we offer one course in co-operation with German radio stations. A course is made up of approximately thirty one-hour radio lectures (one per week), fourteen study letters, voluntary discussion groups at institutions of adult education and four tests. Topics have included mathematics, educational psychology, biology and history, with an average enrolment of 30,000 students.

Therefore, DIFF had considerable experience in the development and implementation of academic printed material, had worked with academic experts on many subjects, had connections with other institutions we served or who served us, had organized programmes with a variety of different socio-economic and geographic backgrounds — and we had the firm belief that multi-media and distance learning is becoming more and more important in adult learning.

What we wanted

All of these DIFF programmes had a common background: to make academic knowledge available to people who for one reason or another were not able to attend a university. The on-going discussion about 'de-schooling' the learning process, about universities without walls, about the needs of the adult learner and the necessity of person-centred learning situations, and the non-existent (or even bad) reputation the universities have in the printed and electronic media in Germany today, showed us that we were moving in the right direction. But we also had to find a programme that incorporated more recent thinking about distance educational programmes.

So what we wanted at this point was a project that should be:

- flexible in place and time, offering easy access for everybody;
- not aimed at a narrow target group but useful for individually differentiated users;
- meaningful for and close to the problems and phenomena of everyday life;
- satisfying actual needs instead of storing knowledge for future needs;
- different from traditional learning settings, utilizing new media and new learning places; and
- on a serious academic level, not making things easier than they should be.

What we learned

In spring 1977 we learned about 'Courses by newspaper' at the University Extension, University of California, San Diego and its combination of weekly newspaper articles and printed material for college courses, about its topics, authors and its great acceptance by newspapers and colleges. On the whole the central ideas of 'Courses by newspaper' made so much sense to us that we started to plan a similar project which we named, in analogy to our *Funkkolleg*, *Zeitungskolleg* (newspaper college).

What we tried: the pilot project

In summer 1977 we started to check our resources as well as the interests of possible partners. Professor Günther Dohmen, former Director of DIFF, who had discovered 'Courses by newspaper', and I, Assistant Professor in the Educational Department of the University of Tübingen were convinced by the idea and began to develop *Zeitungskolleg*. Looking back to the resources available at that time it seems almost incredible that we were able to realize this project in such a short time. Of course there was no full time staff. Money, material and office requirements seemed available in a limited amount – as far as it could be saved from other DIFF projects. It takes at least one year to obtain extra resources for a new project, but we did not want to wait. So I agreed to integrate this additional task in my university activities and a part time secretary was found. In a few months perhaps some more help might be available.

The next step was then taken: to contact the local newspapers of Tübingen and Reutlingen, a neighbouring town, and the director of the *Volkshochschulverband* of our state. The *Volkshochschule* is the only adult education organization that exists in every town in Germany. The *Volkshochschule* is also our partner offering courses for our *Funkkolleg*.

The newspapers and the *Volkshochschule* agreed to try a pilot project with us. We had suggested a list of possible topics, but the newspaper editor suggested a topic, which, supported by the *Volkshochschule*, was formulated as *Landschaft und Geologie* ('landscape in the sense of ecology and geology'), a topic which in our part of Germany makes good sense. It was easy for us to accept this topic.

The serious planning of our pilot project then began. At first we contacted various institutions, professors, teachers and tried to find out: 1) what themes would be interesting for this topic; and 2) who could be

authors for the newspaper articles. When we had settled on a reasonable number of themes and authors we went to the dean of the geological institute of our university and asked him to be our academic co-ordinator: to contact the authors (partly suggested by us, partly by him), to control the academic quality of our material and to advise us in all scientific problems. Here again we were lucky. Being the vice-president of our university he was very interested in showing a wider public what is done behind the walls of the university. Thus, we got a positive response and were ready to begin.

Later we recognized that our more or less intuitive activity was a real model for all our later preparation of new topics:

- At first we try to find possible topics in talks with specialists.
- We offer these to an expert-meeting, consisting of newspaper and *Volkshochschule* officials; we discuss the topics and together agree on a suitable topic.
- Next, we hold informal talks with experts about interesting aspects of our topic. We also ask them to suggest possible authors and academic co-ordinators.
- Then we ask a well-known and widely accepted person to become academic co-ordinator. We believe it is important that he is not only an expert in the subject area, but also open to interdisciplinary approaches, interested in public presentations, and flexible enough to accept the unconventional concept of *Zeitungskolleg*.
- We then suggest themes and authors and ask for his comments. When we have agreed on a list he contacts his colleagues and asks them to participate in the project.
- In addition we ask him to suggest one full time or two part time persons whom we can hire for six to nine months to prepare mainly the printed materials for this project. Usually we get graduate students preparing for their doctorates.

With this accomplished the more detailed work begins. We have to convince the authors not to write for their colleagues but for newspaper subscribers. And we have to select articles to be reprinted for the supplemental text to be used by those subscribers interested in fuller information on the topic.

Finding interested authors -- mostly professors of geology, geography, paleontology at the university -- was surprisingly easy. The concern that the traditional German professor would not be interested was absolutely wrong. All our authors agreed to make their work understandable to the common man (and woman).

They also accepted our rather newspaper-like formulations of article titles (e.g. 'Landscape in the garbage pail?' 'Water is life', 'Resources for our grandchildren', 'Good things coming from beneath', 'The fighting rivers'.)

They also wrote their articles as clearly as they could, but this was not good enough for newspapers. We had expected this problem (based on the University of California experience) and so we hired an experienced journalist from our local newspaper. He wrote primarily about university events for the newspaper and therefore was experienced in translating academic German into a newspaper style. Of course the authors had to approve his rewriting, and again we received a surprisingly positive feedback. Many of the authors liked their rewritten article better than their original manuscripts. For example, one stated, 'You made much clearer, even to me, what I wanted to say!' Only one author refused to accept the re-written article. Finally, we also bought photos and cartoons to illustrate the newspaper articles so they would be more attractive for the average reader.

Looking at the beautifully printed texts produced by 'Courses by newspaper' at the University of California, it was clear that we could not convince any publisher to print a similar book because we had no idea whether anybody would buy it. Instead we took scissors and glue and made copies of appropriate articles from books and journals. For each newspaper article, one chapter of readings was developed, consisting of academic articles, poems, extracts from schoolbooks, documents, novels, articles out of journals and newspapers. They were arranged on the pages as nicely as possible and after having filled 200 pages with fourteen chapters parallel to the fourteen newspaper articles we made 600 Xerox copies (copyrights of course had been obtained). The quality of the photos was not very good, but we could present an interesting book with considerable information for a reasonable price.

Because we wanted to make our materials available to a wide-spread and diverse audience and because we wanted to make it available for various purposes -- the casual reader as well as the teacher and pupil, the college student as well as the professional, the highly educated as well as the worker -- we also prepared a study guide (again using the

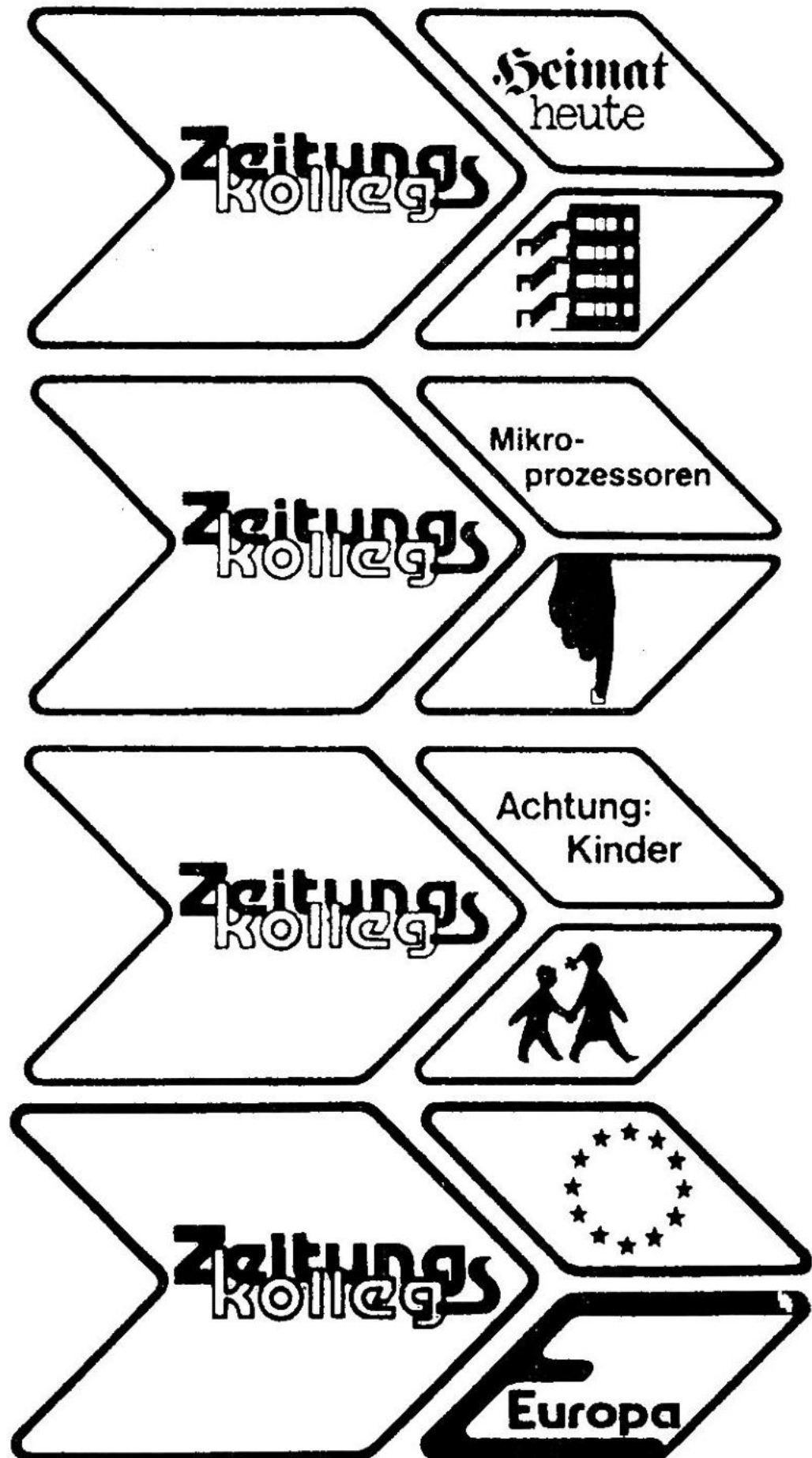


Figure 1. Logos for the *Zeitungskolleg*

'Courses by newspaper' model). This book has no extra information on the subject, but gives advice on how to use the material. Because we wanted *Zeitungskolleg* to provide a better understanding of reality we wanted to stimulate people not only to read but also to make immediate contact with the described phenomena. Therefore, a very important aspect of each chapter was the hints on where to go hiking or to the museum, where to find fossils, or which nature clubs to join in a densely populated country. We had fun writing this part because we could test whether our topic and theme considered close-to-life-subjects. For economical reasons this study guide (48 pages) was typed by our secretary and then was also Xerox copied.

For course leaders at the *Volkshochschule* we developed a twenty page brochure that contained hints. It was divided into three parts: 1) gives general advice about working with a group of adults, 2) gives a list of films, slides, tapes, experimental sets which can be ordered from libraries or other institutions, and 3) gives three or four examples for each chapter as to what to do in the corresponding group meeting. This brochure is free of charge to anyone.

This original experience showed us that realistic and successful ways had been found that would prove useful for further projects:

- The manuscripts of the newspaper articles are revised by a journalist co-operating with the authors.
- In addition to the articles we usually offer the newspaper one photo per article, two cartoons per article and a series logo.
- The book of readings is developed mainly by a specialist hired for six to nine months. Suggestions provided by the authors and, of course, the project staff assist this person in his work.
- Each article in the newspaper series is supplemented by one chapter in the book (about six to ten titles).
- The book is a mixture of articles (from poems and documents to extracts of academic schoolbooks) to demonstrate interdisciplinary approach to motivate as many readers as possible.
- The book design is a group effort. We still use the scissors/glue technique in mounting the articles which we want reprinted in the original format (this is now done by professional offset mounters). The printing quality is also more satisfying now.

- The study guide follows the structure of the chapters; each contains the following subtitles: central ideas, summary of the newspaper article, list of the articles in the book of readings, hints on how to work with the material, questions for self study, discussion themes, what to do, to try, to visit, additional literature (also for youngsters).
- Accompanying each *Zeitungskolleg* we produce a little brochure containing 'hints for working groups'.

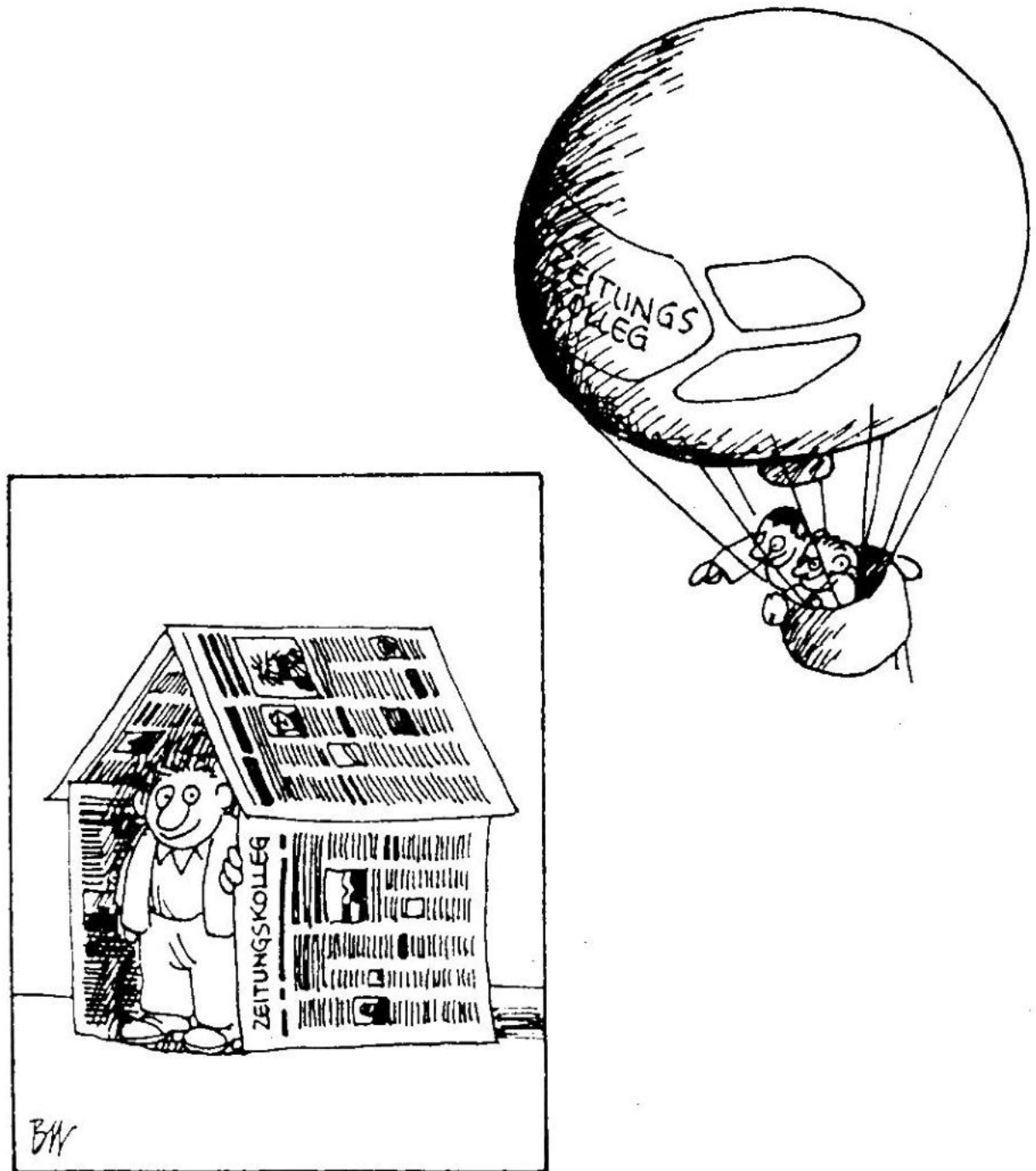


Figure 2. Illustrations for *Zeitungskolleg*

All this was done between September 1977 (when the topic *Landschaft und Geologie* was decided) and February 1978. All printed materials, a poster and an information sheet were finished some days before the deadline. It was hard work, but it was completed on time because all people involved were convinced the idea was a good one. And on February 18th, 1978 two newspapers published the first article to appear in the series.

What we experienced

The first feedback we received was from the newspapers that printed the articles and sold the text and the study guide (the *Volkshochschule* sells them also and it can be ordered by mail). Our materials were so popular that we had to print another 300 after two weeks, and 300 again three weeks later. We received more phone calls and letters from people pleased with the series and materials.

Of course we were then curious. How many subscribers had read our article and how had they liked them? Luckily, during this first semester I was conducting a seminar on research in education. So I gave my students some practical work. They phoned a representative sample of newspaper subscribers (N = 214) of our two newspapers and asked for their opinion aided by a structured questionnaire. Some of the results:

- 61% of the sample knew *Zeitungskolleg*.
- 40% had read one or more of the articles:
 - 5% one article,
 - 23% two to five articles,
 - 12% more than five articles.

The age of the readers varied considerably, the average being 48.4 years ($s = 14,7$; Non-readers 43,1; $s = 17,6$).

<i>Social classes</i>	<i>Readers</i>	<i>Non-readers</i>
Workers	8%	16%
Lower middle class	32%	23%
Academic level	22%	12%
Others (housewives, retired people, pupils, no answer)	37%	48%

It is obvious (and was to be expected) that the better educated readers dominate the readership, but still many workers and employees read

the articles. In the same direction we asked, Did you participate in some educational programmes within the last five years? 59% of our readers had done so, but 75% of the non-readers had not.

The following question we only asked those who had read at least one article, How would you evaluate *Zeitungskolleg* in general? We offered a scale from 1 (= very interesting) to 5 (= not interesting). We received the following results:

1: 29% 2: 50% 3: 20% 4: 1% 5: 0%

76% said that the length of the articles was just right (15%: too long, 9%: too short).

95% said that the articles were understandable even for people who have no special schooling in this subject.

23% said that they were encouraged by this *Zeitungskolleg* to participate in other related activities.

We also asked a small sample of the purchasers of the supplemental materials (N = 65) how they evaluated it:

40% had read half or more of the book of readings, 40% only a small part, 19% nothing. In a scale from 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad) we received these results:

1: 31% 2: 48% 3: 19% 4: 0% 5: 2%

The study guide was used by 54% who evaluated it in this manner:

1: 38% 2: 30% 3: 30% 4: 3% 5: 0%

These evaluation data were of course very gratifying, but more important was the fact that we could demonstrate that our materials and our programme could work. This convinced the managing board of our institute to approve a fully paid project group to continue with new topics.

From local to nationwide

In July 1978 the first full time employees for *Zeitungskolleg* were hired. Today, the staff consists of the project director, an educational specialist for the study materials, an academic journalist, and one full time (or two half time) specialist(s) for the specific topics.

Also, we have two secretaries and three part time student helpers. This fall we received funding by the Robert Bosch Foundation to hire a research specialist on a full time basis. After the decision to continue *Zeitungskolleg* we were assisted by the Volkswagen Foundation which labelled us an unconventional project and financed the necessary office equipment, a half time secretary, research resources and a visit to 'Courses by newspaper', San Diego.

Of course it was not yet possible to develop a new topic for fall 1978 with a staff hired in July 1978. But the local pilot topic, 'Landscape and geology' had been so successful that we decided to repeat it in a revised version in our state (one of eleven states in West Germany). Thus, we could train the new staff and increase the quality of the materials without starting over again, and we could prepare to cope with a larger number of newspapers and *Volkshochschulen*.

Naturally our expanded effort raised new problems (and challenges too). First, we had to contact all daily newspapers in our state. We wrote immediately to all publishers introducing the project, offering the series of fourteen articles and explaining our conditions:

Newspapers are obliged to print the whole series without changing the text. Our photos and cartoons can be used or not, and the use of local illustrations by the newspaper is encouraged. The newspapers receive the series free of charge. We will provide the *Zeitungskolleg* to each daily newspaper that wants to print it. We set a deadline before which an article must not be published and the newspapers receive each article at least ten days before this deadline. The article should be published between the first possible day (always a Saturday) and the following Friday; we recommend that it be published on the same day each week.

We enclosed a copy of the fourteen articles of our pilot model with our invitation letter. In response thirty-four newspapers with a daily combined circulation of 800,000 readers accepted our invitation (approximately 25% of all daily newspapers in our state).

This first state-wide *Zeitungskolleg* in the fall of 1978 provided us a good chance to train our office personnel because we knew that the planned nationwide distribution would require a reliable routine to serve the newspapers, the *Volkshochschulen* and the people who ordered the supplementary material.

For our state project, we commissioned a publisher to distribute the materials to newspapers, *Volkshochschulen* and single buyers. The material is not sold in bookshops because this would have raised the price (which is about \$U.S.5.00 for the book and the study guide). We sold about 6,500 sets of material for this topic.

In spring 1979 our topic was 'Europa', a very important current topic because of the European parliamentary election in June 1979. Again we selected authors and themes as an interdisciplinary basis: they dealt with history, culture, economy and politics. This series of articles was printed in about 100 newspapers in seven states with a circulation of three million readers. About 150 *Volkshochschulen* offered courses and about 5,000 books were sold.

We went nationwide with the project in fall 1979 with the topic, 'Attention, children'. The thirteen articles were printed in 148 newspapers with a circulation of 3.2 million (which means 16% of the West German daily newspaper circulation), 7,600 sets of materials were sold and about 120 courses were offered.

The next topic was 'Microprocessors – the electronic revolution'. It discussed in twelve articles the technology as well as the social and economical implications and risks. There were 137 newspapers participating (a circulation of 2.8 million), 120 courses were sold and 5,100 materials sold.

Summing up

The University of California idea of 'Courses by newspaper' programme came to us at the right time in the right place and, maybe, to the right people(!) Certainly we were well prepared. Our theoretical background about open adult education, our experience in media projects, the resources of our institute and the political situation of our universities fit together. So it became possible within one year after obtaining the basic idea from UC San Diego to plan, implement and to finish a complete pilot project successfully and to go nationwide one year later.

This project produced several innovations:

- *Zeitungskolleg* is interdisciplinary, phenomenon-oriented, related to the experience, while projects on the academic level are usually subject-oriented.
- *Zeitungskolleg* is not produced for a narrow target group but should be usable by everybody. The whole programme (and each single part) is prepared for a heterogeneous group of participants.
- *Zeitungskolleg* has no compulsory catalogue of aims and objectives. We encourage our participants to pick out what seems helpful and reasonable to them.

- *Zeitungskolleg* has no definition of success. The variety of newspapers, themes and users creates an open learning situation which would be spoiled by any formal testing. We trust in self evaluation.
- *Zeitungskolleg* is not specializing, but integrating. It develops a framework in which further information can be incorporated. So we try to promote the generalist, not the specialist.

Of course nobody claims that this should be the only way of adult education. But 'Courses by newspaper' and *Zeitungskolleg* have certainly enriched the variety of flowers in adult education with a creative and innovative species.

After looking backward in this report I now want to look forward. Where in the world will 'Courses by newspaper'/*Zeitungskolleg* No. 3 be started?