

CHARLES WEDEMEYER

Obituary



Professor Charles Wedemeyer died on August 1st 1999. He will be remembered as scholar, author, teacher, administrator, internationalist, philosopher and creator of ideas of open education and distance education.

In the 1950s and 1960s Wedemeyer recognised the wide gap between the published ideals of adult and extension education and the realities of what were delivered, or indeed could be delivered. And he saw how technology might bridge that gap as for four decades he stood as a passionate advocate of applying technology as a tool for opening opportunity and promoting democracy in education and engineered a new educational system that would give opportunity for those whose only chance to learn was “at the back door”. “Learning at the Back Door” was indeed the title he gave the book in which he surveyed some of the sources of his inspiration.

Charles Wedemeyer was a native of Wisconsin and a graduate of its premier university. As Director of the University of Wisconsin's correspondence study program he brought that university to a pre-eminent position among correspondence divisions, especially through associating the university with the work of the U.S. Armed Forces Institute (U.S.A.F.I), the largest teaching organisation in the world with nearly half a million students.

Charles Wedemeyer served as President of the International Council for Correspondence Education, the precursor to ICDE, from 1968 to 1972, He was the University of Wisconsin William Lighty Professor of Education and his course in distance education in the Department of Continuing and Vocational Education was the first in the world. He was the author of more than 140 publications spanning 50 years of scholarship.

He will be remembered throughout the world of distance education for these activities as well as for his personal warmth, kindness, courtesy, generosity, humanity and understanding, all qualities that manifested themselves best as he dealt with learners, attributes perhaps best summarised in the words of Walter James, on the occasion of Charles Wedemeyer's award of the Doctorate of the Open University. “Those whom Distance Education has reached out and touched, “said James: “owe more than they know and far more than they can repay to him.”

Extracted from a statement compiled

By Michael Moore