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Otto Peters

## **Distance Education in Transition**

New Trends and Challenges

4th ed.



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## Series Editors' Foreword

In 1994, Desmond Keegan edited *"Otto Peters on distance education. The industrialization of teaching and learning"* in the Routledge series on Studies in Distance Education. In this way he recognized Otto Peters as an outstanding authority in the field of distance education and acknowledged his far-reaching influence on the development of theory and practice of distance education. The legendary monograph on *"Das Fernstudium an Universitäten und Hochschulen: didaktische Struktur und vergleichende Interpretation - Ein Beitrag zur Theorie der Fernlehre"* (*Distance education at universities and higher education institutions: didactical structure and comparative analysis - a contribution to the theory of distance education*), in which Otto Peters conceives distance education as the most industrialized form of teaching and learning, was first published in 1967. His approach to distance education has been extensively cited and became a widely accepted theory in distance education.

Otto Peters has elaborated over a period of more than thirty years the characteristics of distance education endeavors, concepts and practices and stressed its unique potential to democratize education. Throughout the world, distance teaching institutions are providing access to education for a great number of students, particularly in the field of higher continuing and adult education. Carefully developed and designed instruction, produced and distributed in print or in other mediated forms that reaches out to individual students is in the center of Otto Peters' concern and the guiding principle for shaping the every-day practice of distance education.

It is Otto Peters' vision, the vision of a humanist, to bring about more equity and more equality of educational opportunity by designing more models of high quality distance education in industrialized as well as in developing countries. And it is his vision, the vision of a pedagogue, to marry the model of the autonomous learner as the ultimate goal of all successful teaching and learning, with distance education. In his *"Learning and Teaching in Distance Education. Pedagogical Analyses and Interpretations in an International Perspective"* edited in 1998 (revised in 2001) in the Kogan Page Open and Distance Learning series by Fred Lockwood, Otto Peters provides the systematic and comprehensive pedagogical approach to distance education. He analyzes and interprets the impact of developments from industrial to post-industrial societies. And, at its dawn, he assesses the impact of the new digital information and communications technologies on teaching and learning. He also examines the new trends in distance education as it undergoes concurrent changes.

During recent years Otto Peters has elucidated his approaches to learning and teaching in distance education from a comprehensive point of view and reflected the latest developments of its theory and practice. The results – his latest insights and research findings – are compiled in this book on *Distance Education in Transition: New Trends and Challenges*. In it he describes the revolutionary impact of the digital information and communications technologies on distance education and interprets it from a pedagogical point of view. He sees that it will commence unique opportunities for distance education and especially for the independent learner who will be in future more than ever an autonomous, self-directed learner. At the same time Peters develops perspectives on preserving the humanitarian legacy of distance education in the information age.

Even in the early stages of educational applications on the Web, Otto Peters was attracted to the new technology. In 1997, he engaged himself as part of a team of distinguished experts in the development and the teaching of the Virtual Seminar for Professional Development in Distance Education, conducted by Ulrich Bernath and Eugene Rubin. His fascination with this pioneering experiment resulted in his continuing teaching commitment in the online Master of Distance Education (MDE) program. This program succeeded the virtual seminar and since the beginning of 2000 is jointly offered by the University of Maryland University College and Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. Otto Peters is a passionate faculty, tutor, moderator, and facilitator in the online learning environment, demonstrating and practicing approaches of how to make this new online format of teaching and learning a success for his students.

The editors of the ASF Series are grateful to Otto Peters for making his new scholarly achievements available to his students in the MDE program, to other students interested in more expansive studies of the foundations of distance education, to colleagues in the field, and, of course, to all who are curious and attracted by these latest works of Otto Peters. We are pleased to share with Fred Lockwood the honor of writing the forewords for this book, which was first published in 2002.

The third edition has been updated and expanded by two articles included in chapters 9 & 10 and by a name and subject index. With Otto Peters' "Visions of Autonomous Learning" in the 11th chapter of the fourth edition his impressive work is rounded up.

Franziska Vondrlik deserves our appreciation and gratitude for her constant editorial assistance.

The Editors  
November 2004

## Foreword by Fred Lockwood

As an educator or trainer, working with school children or university students, trainees in industry or workers in commerce, you will have been bombarded by claims as to the extent to which *Communication & Information Technology* will influence learning and teaching. We are repeatedly told we are at the beginning of a digital revolution that will fundamentally change our methods of learning and teaching; a revolution that will change our lives. However, such rhetoric, and even eye catching illustrations of how the new media can be used, is no substitute for careful consideration of the pedagogy upon which such claims must ultimately be based and how the research evidence is interpreted.

In this book *Distance Education in Transition. New Trends and Challenges*, Professor Otto Peters makes a major contribution to this specific domain of knowledge. He extends his analysis and discussion of the pedagogy inherent in distance education and virtual learning environments; one that was started with his book *Learning and Teaching in Distance Education* (1998, revised edition 2001). These books provide a basis from which this revolution can be assessed, that can combine the best of current practice and allow us to contribute to this revolution.

The fundamental position that Professor Peters adopts is that in preparing our students for life in the knowledge economy, and learning in a digital environment, the aim should be to provide opportunities for *autonomous* learning not *heteronomous* learning. We should strive for a pedagogy that is learner centred and interactive, providing an opportunity for learners to be self-directed, self-reliant and self-regulated. He contrasts this with the pedagogy that has been dominant for centuries - that of expository teaching and receptive learning. In the new environment, that many are embracing, Professor Peters suggest we – the teachers - will no longer be the source of all information and content; our role will change to that of guide and facilitator. We will no longer be the *sage on the stage* but the *guide on the side*. It represents a fundamental change from a teaching to a learning culture. In this digital learning environment the goal will be for learners to plan, organise, control and evaluate their own learning. In doing so they will be involved in navigating, browsing, searching, connecting and collecting information within an environment few of us could have considered less than a generation ago.

We should be under no illusions – we *are* in the midst of a revolution in learning and teaching that has massive and far-reaching implications. We ignore it at our peril and to the detriment of our learners. However, this book was not written for technophiles and we do not need a detailed understanding of computers, software and networks – in fact we only need to be aware that this technology exists. It aims at a *pedagogical* interpretation of distance education and online learning. It advocates and demands pedagogical reform.

This book will challenge many of our long-standing assumptions and practices. This may be uncomfortable of some of us. However, the reward for our efforts will be considerable. Peters describes the pedagogy of a whole new-world of learning and teaching, a gateway to life long learning. It is likely that you too will be convinced that our aim should not be for teacher dominated, goal directed behaviour but for

independent networked thinking – for *autonomous* learners. Our aim should not be to perpetuate previous teaching and learning practices in the new environment but to consider a whole array of possibilities that are open to us.

Fred Lockwood

Manchester, January 2002

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