

Status and Trends of Distance Education (2nd Ed.)

Börje Holmberg

Lund, Sweden: Lector Publishing, 1985, 270 pages

The second edition of Börje Holmberg's *Status and Trends* was chiefly occasioned by Prof. Holmberg's desire to reduce the confusion that some readers thought made the first edition difficult, especially in the use of the bibliography. Except for the reorganized bibliography, the change in the second edition is not substantial. Nevertheless, the more that can be done to make Holmberg's bibliography useful to specialists and students throughout the world, the better for understanding the status and trends of distance education.

Holmberg has reached a peak of influence widely recognized in distance education. I met him first in 1961 when he was assistant to Dr. Gunnar Gadden, Director-General of Hermod's, the great Swedish correspondence school. I was doing a study of fourteen major correspondence schools in Europe, under a grant from the Ford Foundation. Dr. Gadden was my host, but he made a point of introducing the young Börje Holmberg to me as a person who would go far in his chosen field.

In about five years, after Gadden had retired, Holmberg became Director-General of Hermod's, and by 1976 he was beginning his transition to the FernUniversität in Hagen, West Germany. There Holmberg quickly took his place as a professor of methodology in distance education. By 1981 and the first edition of *Status and Trends*, Holmberg had become the Director of the Central Institute for Research (ZIFF) at the FernUniversität. He has consulted in many countries, and his books are well known almost anywhere where there is professional interest in distance education.

Holmberg has been consistent in trying to explain and elucidate distance study and encouraging others to become competent in this field. Although he was not the first to create a curriculum for the education of distance study specialists, he has been among the most persistent in striving for this objective, as each edition of *Status and Trends* demonstrates.

The essence of Holmberg's *Status and Trends* is a tight marriage of form and substance. It is highly structured, logically developed, methodically and systematically arranged prose. Arabic numerals precede main and subsidiary topics, with as many as four decimal divisions linking related items. Main items are: (1) The distance study concept; (2) A philosophy of distance education; (3) Pre-produced courses—course development; (4) Communication in distance study; (5) The organization and administration of distance education; (6) Evaluating distance

education; (7) The economics of distance education; (8) Distance study and formal education; and (9) Bibliography.

Holmberg's books, including *Status and Trends*, are slim books packed with empirical data, but they are also highly personal books, peppered with strong statements of avowal and absolute intent. The second edition of *Status and Trends* is characteristically parsimonious with white space, and prodigal with lengthy lines of small print. The quality of reproduction is fair.

One of the great strengths of this book is its bibliography—a fine accomplishment. Holmberg has drawn together much of the relevant literature bearing on distance education, correspondence study, and even non-traditional learning. His European sources are particularly good, but he does less well with American, South American, and other non-European sources.

Holmberg's concept of the philosophical, historical, and theoretical development of the field is generally adequate, but from the point of view of some non-Europeans, it may seem weakened by over-dependence upon, for example, the Peters view of industrial origins of distance study, narrowly defined terms, and somewhat rigid ideological constraints.

However, these are not serious flaws for the reader who wants to learn as much as he/she can in a field that is still developing. Holmberg attains his objective in *Status and Trends* (2), and the improvement in the bibliography confirms his reason for undertaking the second edition.

Holmberg's *Status and Trends of Distance Education*, Second Revised Edition, 1985, will be particularly useful for persons who have a serious interest in distance education and are motivated to discover, as Holmberg elucidates, "educational principles and frame factors of a general type" (p. v).

This is a valuable book which deserves careful study.

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