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Education Professor Writes Book on Amish Education

Quick Facts

- Mark Dewalt, education, has written "Amish Education in the United States and Canada."
- Dewalt grew up in Pennsylvania near an Amish community and has studied the group's way of life for more than 20 years.



Mark Dewalt

ROCK HILL, S.C. - "**Amish Education in the United States and Canada**," a new book by Winthrop University education professor and Director of Graduate Studies **Mark Dewalt**, portrays the culture and history of the one-room school houses of the Amish community.

Dewalt grew up in Pennsylvania near an Amish community and has studied their simple way of life for more than 20 years. In the past few years, he has traveled to dozens of communities stretching from New York to Iowa to observe in schools and to interview educators and residents about daily life in the classroom.

As he outlines Amish history and religious practices, **Dewalt** explains the struggle between various states and the Amish communities over the length of schooling for their children. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the early 1970s that states could not compel the Amish to attend formal high school through age 16. For Amish children, formal education ends at the eighth grade after completing work in core subjects such as arithmetic, reading and writing. Adolescents then learn the skills needed for adulthood working alongside their elders.

Dewalt shares vivid details on Amish curriculum, textbooks, teaching strategies, special education and schools in different regions. Since Amish schools are so small, he finds that Amish pupils receive ample personal attention. His research indicates that they are very literate, value community and learn responsibility for their own education. "In the Amish culture, school is the work of children and work is to be enjoyed," **Dewalt** notes. "Thus, the Amish do not view work as something to be avoided so that they can purchase entertainment." Without electricity, Amish families do not have access to television, radio and video games.

Education is meant to prepare Amish children for a life of separation, humility and service among a community of believers. "The Amish heritage values manual labor in the farming tradition. Manual labor is something to be cherished, not avoided," **Dewalt** writes. "The Amish believe that the one-room school house located in a rural setting was and remains an ideal setting for one to acquire these skills and values."

There are some disadvantages to the Amish education system including too many young teachers, high teacher turnover, low teacher salaries and some parents who do not support the teacher as they should.

Dewalt came to Winthrop University in 1996 after holding teaching positions at Susquehanna University and Lenoir-Rhyne College. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia.

Published by Rowman & Littlefield Education (\$26.50 paperback), "**Amish Education in the United States and Canada**" will be available in July. It is ideal for those interested in cultural diversity, education, religion and anthropology.

For additional information, contact **Dewalt** at 803/323-2151 or dewaltm@winthrop.edu.

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