Evaluating e-Learning: Guiding Research and Practice
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Review by Mark Gamble

Published in 2012, Evaluating e-Learning: Guiding Research and Practice joins the four other books in Routledge’s widely-respected ‘Connecting with e-
Learning’ series. Comprising three parts, Setting the Scene, Theory and Practical Aspects of Evaluation Research, the book sets out to address common concerns for those academics attempting to come to grips with learning online in support of a traditional curriculum. Part One briefly addresses questions regarding the extent to which, if at all, e-learning differs from learning and explains why it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies we adopt, especially in the online context.

Part Two explores a theoretical approach based around the authors’ not unreasonable premise that ‘Students learn within learning environments, going through learning processes in order to achieve learning outcomes’ (pg 22) and hence at the heart of the book, as explained at the start of Part Two, is a model called the LEPO (Learning Environment, Processes, Outcomes) framework. Building on the work of Biggs (1989), Laurillard (2002), Bain (1999), Reeves and Reeves (1997) and Goodyear (Ellis and Goodyear, 2010) provides a very helpful generalized and integrated conceptual framework for learning that facilitates a rigorous approach to evaluating and researching learning online.

For early researchers, or those coming fresh to the idea of research, Chapter Five provides a very approachable guidance to Research Paradigms and Methodologies leading the reader into discussion of a range of approaches of evaluation research that would be appropriate in the field of e-learning and closing Part Two.

In the final five chapters that comprise Part Three, the authors offer ideas addressing the practical aspects of evaluation research. Over the course of 180 pages, the reader is offered clear, relevant, suggestions for the practical application of theory, starting, of course, with planning your evaluation-research activity and moving on to considering research across the life-cycle of an online learning experience. This might be as small an activity as evaluating the effectiveness of the use of a discussion online to address a particularly key concept, right up to a fully distance delivery course and anything in-between. Increasingly, it is going to be a requirement that we take an evaluative approach to our use of BREO and its components and this book will prove highly valuable as an inspiration and a guide.

The authors remind us that it is not the technology that does the learning, it is the students. They remind us that when we take decisions to implement a particular approach to the curriculum that uses technology, the learning outcomes are the result of the learning processes we provide for our students and that the learning environment – the BREO units we build for our students to learn in – can moderate and mediate those processes in ways that we must seek to understand through evaluative research in order to make sure the learning actually happens. This is one book that can help make that task very much easier: highly recommended.