designs, expert systems and artificial intelligence will be included in a revised edition or a future companion publication.

REVIEWER

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Evaluating Open and Distance Learning by Mary Thorpe. Mississauga, ON: Copp, Clark, Pitman, 1988. ISBN O-582-90119-7 (CDN $29.95)

Reviewed by Mary F. Kennedy

According to the author, this book is written for the practitioner — not the evaluation practitioner, but the practitioner in the field of open/distance learning. Unlike most books on evaluation, it does not include an historical overview of evaluation theory and design. Rather it goes to the heart of the matter — evaluation as a practice.

Evaluating Open and Distance Learning is divided into three sections. Part One: **Open Learning and Distance Education** presents two brief chapters on evaluation, defining the term and setting the focus on who uses and/or ultimately benefits from evaluation. Thorpe makes a case for learner collaboration and a team approach. A really nice feature of Chapter Two is the inclusion of five case studies, all selected on the basis of interest and application to the potential audience.

Part **Two: Evaluation in Practice** contains four chapters on learner self-evaluation, tuition or tutoring, counselling, and course or learning materials. Each chapter provides an overview of evaluation activity in relation to that specific component of open and distance learning. The activities, and Thorpe's suggestions regarding implementing evaluation, draw on data from past completed evaluations. There appears to be, on cursory reading, an over-reliance on Open University data, but, as Thorpe explains, there is little evidence that evaluation is being implemented elsewhere in open and distance education settings. Numerous samples of evaluation checklists, survey instruments, and interview guides are included in these chapters, providing the reader with a flavour of the type of evaluation activity undertaken.

Part Three: **The Process of Data Collection** includes two chapters and a conclusion. As the author indicates, the purpose of this section is not to provide a how-to manual, but to focus on the application of these methods to open and distance learning. Thorpe reiterates the view that learners and practitioners should define the type of evaluation they want, since evaluation should be

undertaken for the development of learning and the enrichment of learning experiences.

The introductory chapter of this section - Chapter Seven - is the weakest of the book. The problem lies in the scope of material included. Entitled Planning and Data Collection, it is supposedly presented within the context of the social organization of evaluation, but this concept gets lost early on in the nitty-gritty of topics such as chairing meetings, and keeping minutes and ensuring equality of contribution from evaluation team members. In addition there is unevenness of treatment of the various data collection techniques, and so little information on them as to render the treatment meaningless.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter, focuses on the social implications of evaluation, an area Thorpe claims is underemphasized in most evaluation texts. On that point there is no argument. She draws together the elements of this rather complex social process called evaluation, and while not as prescriptive as in earlier sections, the organization and presentation of the information is helpful to the reader who is interested in looking beyond the doing of evaluation activity to the implementation of practices based on evaluation findings.

Her conclusion, while brief, deals with the issue of quality control and she makes the plea for moving beyond the attainment of an acceptable standard of program implementation, the aim of most quality control policies, toward excellence.

Evaluating Open and Distance Learning is a good book for its intended audience. Little understanding of or background in evaluation is required to implement evaluation activity on the scale recommended by the author and the book would certainly provide basic guidance in getting started. One would have to accept the notion, of course, that any type of evaluation is an improvement over no evaluation.

The book has certain bonus features which would make it popular with the novice evaluator. The organization is appealing, and the discrete chapters on each major component to be considered in the evaluation of open and distance education provides the reader with an idea of the scope of course evaluations. Each chapter is followed by a short but good selection of further readings which Thorpe considerably annotates for the reader. The focus of evaluation activity is not research-based; rather, the emphasis is always practical. Formative evaluation is the thrust, for the purpose of course or program monitoring, modication and improvement.

In summary, for the clearly defined audience of open and distance education practitioners this book is ideal as an easy-reading, non-threatening introduction to evaluation, and many practitioners in that field would fit the category of novice evaluator. For those already versed in program evaluation, the book has little to offer.

REVIEWER

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