**Smith, CR**

David Boud, Rola Ajjawi, Phillip Dawson and Joanna Tai (Eds.) (2018) Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education, Abingdon: Routledge (978-1-138-08935-8 [Pbk], 202pp)

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**Article**

**David Boud, Rola Ajjawi, Phillip Dawson and Joanna Tai (Eds.) (2018) *Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education*, Abingdon: Routledge (ISBN 978-1-138-08935-8 [Pbk], 202pp)**
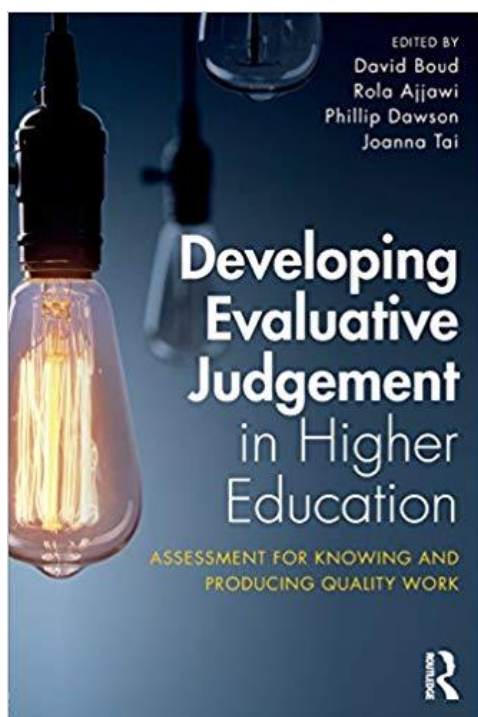
The context that this book sets itself within is portrayed as one of increasing uncertainty. It presents a future in which graduates must develop skills for lifelong learning, adaptation and autonomy. It is argued that, contrarily, traditional assessment methods in higher education foster dependency, with teachers as experts – sole arbiters of judgements about the quality of work – curtailing key skills demanded by a constantly changing employment landscape.

The editors' definition of evaluative judgement, taken from Tai et al. (2018: 471), is "the capability to make decisions about the quality of work of self and others." There are three particularly notable keywords at work here. First, that evaluative judgement is a capability, a skill, and not an activity; second, that it concerns quality – distinguishing the good from the less good with reference to a standard; and third, that it is applied to work, and not the self. At its core, this is an expansion of the established ambition in higher education for engaging students as active agents in their learning, through facilitating opportunities for them to participate in making and articulating judgements over their own work and that of others. Evaluative judgement is an empowerment of students to become active participants in understanding quality and developing connoisseurship regarding their work and their learning, thereby demystifying and potentially democratising teachers' assessment of their work – a laudable aim in itself.

Research and writing about assessment and feedback is a crowded place. It is recognised from the outset that the concept of evaluative judgement may not be new, and this is reflected in some of the literature cited – which includes Royce Sadler and David Nicol – reinforcing that the underlying concept of evaluative judgement is an established field in higher education research. However, the editors argue that this book's value lies in advancing this concept, through considering it explicitly and systematically, and using it as an integrative organising framework for designing assessment.

In terms of structure the editors suggest reading Chapter One first rather than dipping into the other chapters, as this introduces a framework of evaluative judgement. They then advise that subsequent chapters can be read in any order enabling the reader to dip in and out at will. The book is divided into three sections, covering theoretical perspectives, a range of approaches to developing evaluative judgement, and the application of evaluative judgement in work and practice. However, with each chapter being a short, stand-alone essay there is a significant amount of repetition when reading cover to cover.

Some historical context for the concept of evaluative judgement is provided by Chapter Five, which then informatively elaborates on the layers of complexity

within it. Here, Robert Nelson proposes a short taxonomy: hard evaluative judgement – which is more objective and analytical; soft evaluative judgement – based on importance or value; and dynamic evaluative judgement – which occurs as a seemingly inseparable part of the processes of creation, construction and composition. Perhaps controversially, Nelson suggests that the tools of constructive alignment – learning outcomes, assessment criteria and marking rubrics – hamper teaching evaluative judgement and, in particular, the latter two dimensions of his taxonomy as they serve to inhibit conjecture and imagination.

In Chapter Six, Gordon Joughin highlights a crucial notion that the skills involved in evaluating work are the same as those involved in producing the work, the implication of which is that those students who could gain most from the process may struggle with it. He also draws attention to intuitive, unreasoned judgement, heuristics and unconscious bias – a concept developed at length in Kahneman's (2011) entertaining and popular book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* – which sheds light on some of the complexities involved in any act of evaluative judgement. The concept of heuristics is developed further in the following chapter by Jason Lodge et al., which addresses the illusion of competence, where students most in need of rectifying the disparity between evaluative judgements of their progress

and their actual progress are similarly the least likely to recognise it. These chapters highlight that developing evaluative judgement must be carefully supported, and that developing the capability to make decisions about the quality of a piece of work is a skill, and like all skills, mastery requires iterative practice. It becomes increasingly clear that the processes involved should be an explicit learning experience – one that is carefully scaffolded – with repeated opportunities to engage with it.

Whilst developing evaluative judgement is seen as a key skill for students in their learning, even teachers might struggle to explain the processes involved, as expressed by the sentiment 'I know good work when I see it'; however, explaining what makes a piece of work good, and why, is much more challenging. In respect of translating an extensively tacit process into an explicit, iterative one, the book's section on approaches to developing evaluative judgement achieves two significant aims; firstly, identifying the processes involved in creating a developmental approach to evaluative judgement, and secondly, illustrating different means through which this can be achieved, such as peer review and use of exemplars.

This section is highly informative for teachers seeking to develop students' evaluative judgement through their own teaching practices. It includes: how factors such as task design and teaching

practice can support and hinder students' judgements (Sue Bennett et al., Chapter Nine); considerations when interleaving exemplars to demonstrate standards and promoting dialogic feedback to maximise their beneficial contribution (Phillip Dawson, Chapter Ten; David Carless et al., Chapter Eleven); and harnessing technology to create richer feedback in supporting the development of evaluative judgement (Michael Henderson et al., Chapter Twelve; Cath Ellis, Chapter Thirteen). Though recent debate gave me pause for thought here. Many of the interventions to nurture evaluative judgement described in the book are associated with coursework; whereas, a rising tide of problems associated with plagiarism and essay-mills, as well as recent changes to secondary-level education, have led to suggestions that higher education adopt more exam-based evaluations. How would the concept of evaluative judgement fare within such a context, where opportunities for iterative, formative and discussion-based processes may be fewer?

The chapters in the final section discuss examples of nurturing evaluative judgement in situations closely aligned with professional contexts, thus preparing students for future appraisals of quality beyond the campus. For example, Margaret Bearman (Chapter Fifteen) discusses developing evaluative judgement in relation to disciplinary and individual identity, including tacit

understandings about what quality means to, and how it relates to, core values of a given discipline. It is notable that the examples given in this section of the book all come from medical and healthcare programmes, likely due to the prevalence of workplace learning in these disciplines. There are some particularly interesting methods presented – such as Charlotte Rees et al.'s (Chapter Eighteen) description of using narratives to promote reflection-on-action within an evaluative judgement arena defined by two dimensions, focus [inward – outward] and standards [explicit – implicit]. However, whilst these approaches might be capable of being translated in other disciples, there seems a missed opportunity to explore similarities and differences regarding evaluative judgement across a variety of other professional contexts.

*Developing Evaluative Judgement* makes an insightful addition in an area that is underdeveloped and often an implicit, hidden learning objective. The book explicates processes that academics can find challenging to articulate, and provides a valuable resource on ways in which students can develop nuanced understandings of quality in relation to their work and the work of others, and the skills to articulate such judgements. These will be of great interest to teachers seeking to develop students' evaluative judgement through their own practices. However, in their concluding chapter the editors caution that this is unlikely to be

sufficiently effective if approached as an isolated act, at an individual module level for example; achieving the most impact in developing students' critical capacities demands a more systematic approach of incremental development, coherently interwoven throughout the entire programme. This is more of a challenge but one, they argue, that is worth rising to.

Reviewed by **Charlie Smith**

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